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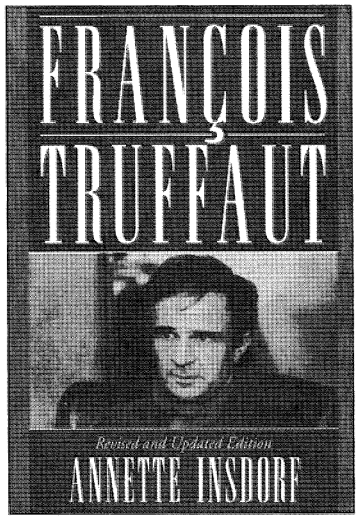

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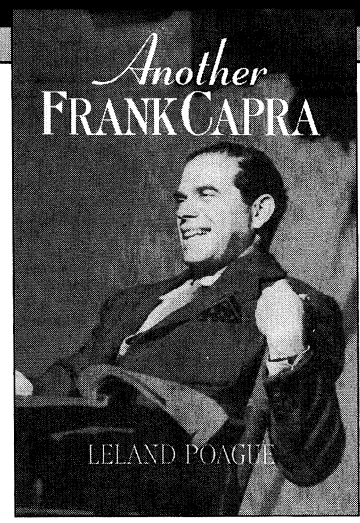

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Peter Harcourt

Imaginary Images

An Examination of Atom Egoyan's Films

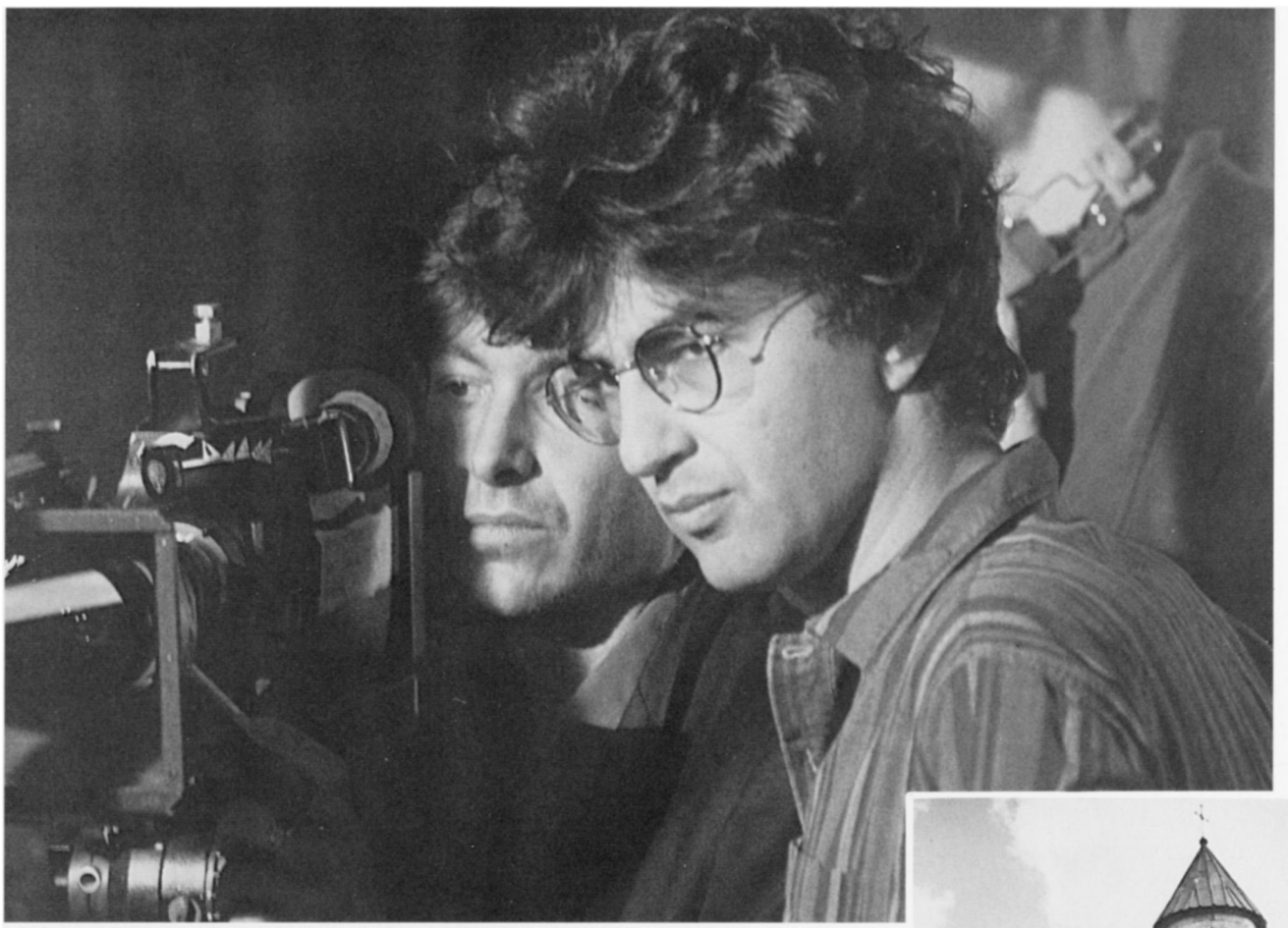
I'm attracted to people who are lost in a world that I can navigate. Atom Egoyan[1]

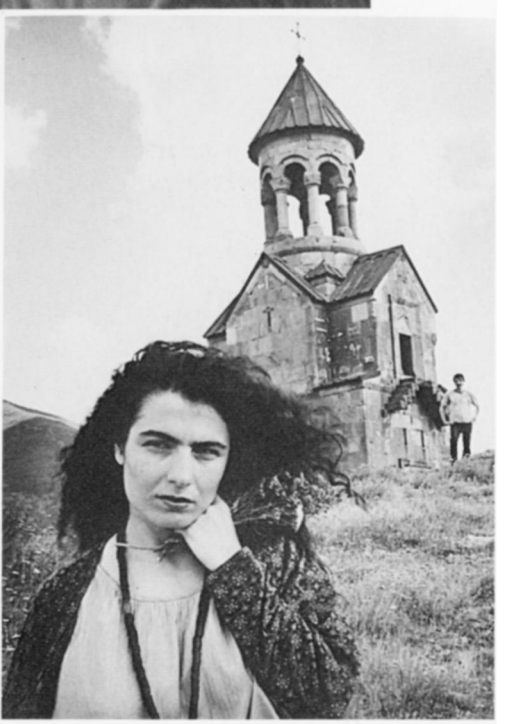
There is a sequence in *Exotica*, the latest film by 35-year-old Canadian film-maker Atom Egoyan, that makes me think of Andrew Wyeth. There is a long shot of an extended grassy field. In the distance, a number of people appear on the horizon, walking in unison. They are looking for something. As in Wyeth's "Christina's World," there is a surreal combination of beauty and dread. Are they on a ramble, these people, looking at flora and fauna? Or are they looking for something else? Not until well into the film, as we continually return to this particular sequence, will we receive an answer to these questions.

Like other Egoyan films, *Exotica* (1994) interweaves three narrative elements. Images are established, characters are introduced; but their relationship to one another is unclear. This is Egoyan's form of cinematic suspense. Like other Egoyan films, *Exotica* focuses on the problems of looking—on the desire to spy, the need to see.

During the first scene, at an airport, we watch Thomas, an eccentric character, shuffling through customs. We can also see a customs officer peering at him through a pane of one-way glass. He is exhorting his assistant to also look. He must learn to detect, the officer explains, that something hidden which you have to find. "Look at him!" he exclaims. "Carefully! What do you see?"

This exhortation also applies to us. When we are watching a film by Atom Egoyan, there is always something hidden that we have to find. In *Exotica*, there are the scenes involving Thomas, who runs an "exotic" pet shop and who goes to the ballet in the evenings; there are the search scenes already referred to; and there are scenes involving Francis, a tax auditor, who frequents a strip club called Exotica. These scenes crisscross one another in the contrapuntal fashion that characterizes Egoyan's work, sometimes suggesting parallels, sometimes differences.





(above) On the set of *Family Viewing*: Atom Egoyan (right) with Peter Metler; (right) Arsinée Khanjian in *Calendar*

A person who is "here" but would rather be somewhere else is an exile or a prisoner; a person who is "here" but thinks he is somewhere else is insane. Margaret Atwood[2]

Although it hasn't seen itself in this way, Canadian cinema has often reflected the insecurities of a colonial world. It has also registered inclinations toward a postcolonial escape.

In the early days, *À tout prendre* (1963), *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (1964), *Le chat dans le sac* (1964), and *Paperback Hero* (1973) all constructed cultures of entrapment, as *Termini Station* (1989) and *Léolo* (1992) do today. Furthermore, *Entre la mer et l'eau douce* (1967), *Goin' Down the Road* (1970), *l'Acadie, l'Acadie* (1971), and, more recently, *Highway 61* (1991) are all films of displacement and migration. The classic Canadian dilemma as formulated by Northrop Frye a good many years ago concerns less the existential question, Who am I? than the cultural one, Where is here?[3] Canadian ontology has

always been bound up with a dialectics of space, and one of the dominant narrative modes both in literature and film involves the quest.

As if to underline this colonial dependence, many commentators have remarked on the absence of real men in Canadian films, on the absence of father figures or even of elder brothers.[4] During the 1960s and early 1970s, there are no fathers at all in Quebecois films; and when an actual father appears in an Anglophone film like *Nobody Waved Goodbye*, his authority is so flaccid that the filiation is refused.

While the faces and the colors of Canada are changing, metonymically in our films the situation remains the same. In *Sitting in Limbo* (1986), a quasi-fictional study of a group of young English-speaking blacks in Montreal, there is a distinct absence of responsible males. Similarly, in *Welcome to Canada* (1989), *Perfectly Normal* (1990), *Masala* (1991), and *Léolo*, there are few admirable authority figures.

Most consistently contestational, however, about the inadequacy of fathers is the work of Atom Egoyan. As a deliberately self-constructed Canadian of Egyptian birth and Armenian descent, Egoyan devises films that register the personal uncertainties of people who are striving to find a place of rest within a culture not their own. His six theatrical features, together with a number of shorts and television dramas, reflect and analyze the cultural uncertainties of the Canadian situation.

In *Next of Kin* (1984), his first feature, Egoyan both acknowledges the twin cinematic inheritance established 30 years ago by *Nobody Waved Goodbye* and *Le chat dans le sac* and refuses to accept their cultural implications.[5] Like the protagonist in *Nobody Waved Goodbye,* Egoyan's character is called Peter. He too lives in a suburban split-level home in which there is no privacy. And here too, the parents are always quarreling about their son's future. Peter (Patrick Tierney) wants none of it. He doesn't want to do anything. He wants to pretend. He wants to be someone else.

The film opens with shots of an airport, the site both of flight and of change—a scene, incidentally, that will not be diegetically placed until later in the film. After a shot of Peter in bed, pulling the duvet over his head to block out his parents' quarreling, we see him sitting by a swimming pool. He introduces himself. "My name is Peter," he says. "I'm 23 years old and I've lived at home all my life, watching my parents dislike one another." The film then constructs what Peter is planning to do to escape from his suburban cultural trap.

Recognizing that identity is less a matter of essence than of cultural positioning, less an inheritance than a potential politics, Egoyan's Peter refuses his West Coast Angloceltic filiations in order to ally himself with an Armenian family in Toronto. It is through this deliberate repositioning that Peter is able, so to speak, to come into his own. As he says later in the film:

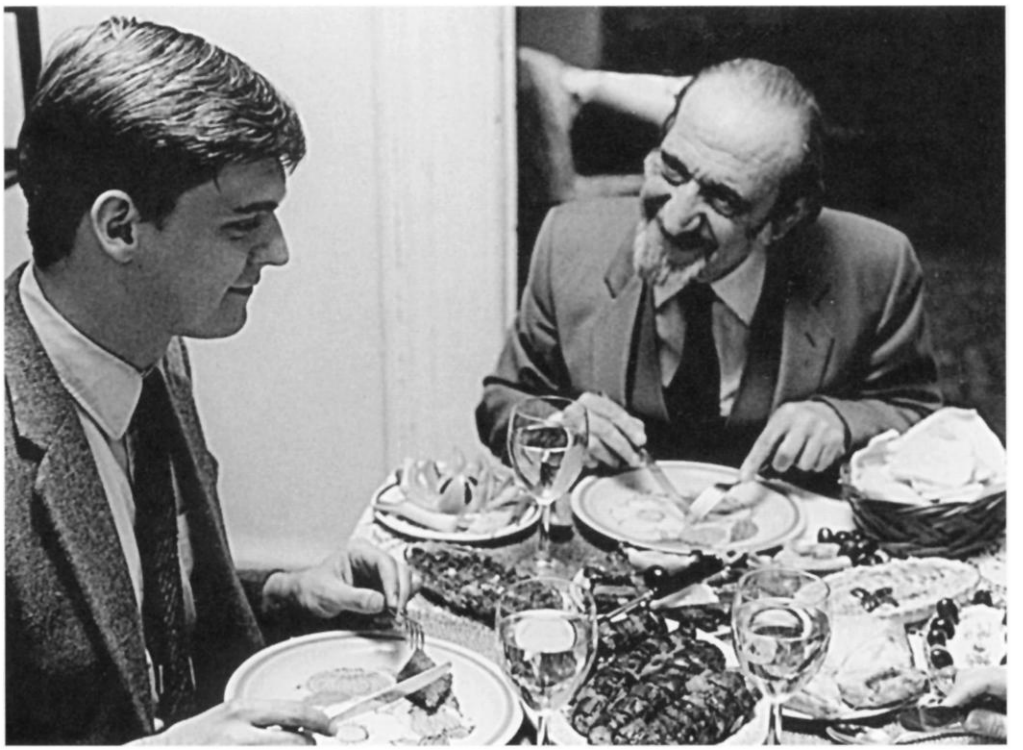
> I've figured out a long time ago that being alone was easier if you became two people. One part of you would always be the same, like an audience; and the other part would take on different roles, like an actor.

Only by accepting some form of cultural schizophrenia—indeed, a chiasmatic sense of self—can Peter begin to negotiate his way out of the stifling inheritance of the Angloceltic middle classes. By exchanging his wimpy, WASP father for a passionate, if bigoted, Armenian father, he is able to devise a new feeling of identity.

> *Can any representation of a human being . . . be taken at face value? What does "face value" mean when all the faces are so carefully composed and lit to be as dramatically amplified as possible within the frame?* Atom Egoyan[6]

Next of Kin establishes what will be, for Egoyan, some recurring themes and stylistic strategies. First of all, there is the family. For Egoyan, the family provides a microcosm of the social world. However, its values must always be contested. This leads to the second theme that pervades Egoyan's world: the characters' need to reconstruct their identity, to try on different roles until they find one that might fit. This entails an abrogation of inheritance and an appropriation of the ideas of difference, of alterity, of something other—but less an *external* other than the other which, although inside us, has been denied.

It is through Peter's fictional transformation of himself into Bedros, the family's long-lost Armenian son, and through his intimate conversations with Azah (Arsinée Khanjian, the film-maker's wife), his newfound "sister," that Peter can begin fully to be himself. If at the beginning of the film we see him *pretending*



Next of Kin: Patrick Tierney (left) and Berge Fazlian

to play the Spanish guitar, at the end we see Bedros *actually* playing it. Meanwhile, Azah is arranging her new photographs in her family album.

This acceptance of the immanent other often entails some kind of exile—the third recurring theme in Egoyan's films. Where Peter chooses his exile, Azah has hers thrust upon her. She is thrown out of her home for dressing "like a whore," as her father says. So Azah, too, must renegotiate her inherited identity. As a woman, she wants some of the freedoms established by Angloceltic culture in North America, while Peter wants some of the commitments of his adopted Armenian household.

If there are three basic themes in Egoyan's work involving family, identity, and the necessity of exile, there are also three stylistic strategies. These strategies relate to acting, dialogue, and narrative structure.

Egoyan instructs his actors to deliver their lines in a flat, deadpan way. He has his Brechtian/Bressonian reasons for this type of direction, as he once suggested:

> Rather than inviting the viewer to lose himself in a screen presence, the actor asks the viewer to question what it is about the character he's *supposed* to identify with. In this way, a more profound relationship can be established.[7]

This style of acting, however, is also appropriate to the characters' uncertain sense of self, to their efforts to relinquish received identities and to renegotiate new ones, as cinematic spectators must negotiate new ones with them.

Allied to this strategy is Egoyan's Pinteresque dialogue. His characters speak in a series of non sequiturs—in staccato, absurdist statements that enact a dimension of alienation but which also serve to abstract the *personae* from any simple notion of psychological realism, from a merely reflective mimesis.

Thirdly, both the flatness of the acting and the deployment of absurdist dialogue facilitate Egoyan's desire to achieve a contrapuntal structure for his films. Skilled in music and theater, he thinks out his films' structures in deliberately musical ways, like three-part inventions as we know them from Bach. Furthermore, the absurdist repetition of situations and scraps of dialogue bestows upon his narratives a serial dimension. We sense the presence of a rational intelligence ordering these experiences and directing our attention to relationships among them. Indeed, we might be profoundly moved by them—especially by the thrill of their intricate orchestration—but the "meaning" is seldom clear.

Finally, if through his treatment of actors, his dialogue, and his contrapuntal structures Egoyan's cin-

ema is a cinema of surfaces, these surfaces are generally troubled in his films by photographic or televisual technologies of reproduction. *Next of Kin, The Adjuster, Calendar,* and *Exotica* all utilize photographs; *Next of Kin, Family Viewing, Speaking Parts,* and *Calendar* all utilize television. Video is everywhere—recording experience, mediating experience, "surveilling" experience, reducing reality to replica.

Egoyan's cinema is an art of images within a culture supersaturated with the overproduction of images. As he has explained:

> I'm somebody who's torn constantly between a deep suspicion of images and a desire and a seduction by the process of making images. That I think is laced through all the work I'm doing. It's a very exciting terrain to be exploring at this point, at the end of the century. It seems to be *the* fundamental issue in a society completely overrun by images.[8]

This intense concern with images is distinctly Canadian. Growing up saturated with images of the United States, we have a special problem in distinguishing between what is imaginary and what is real. This was the situation of Rick Dillon in *Paperback Hero*, and it certainly provides the central theme of David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1982). In fact, *Videodrome* is perhaps the *Urtext* for a whole generation of Toronto film-makers. Containing in the figure of Brian O'Blivion a parodic representation of Marshall McLuhan, *Videodrome* charts the central character's growing inability to distinguish between his real life and his video imaginings. "Television is reality: reality is less than television," as O'Blivion declaims. "Your reality is already half video hallucination. . . . "

From this film springs not only *Family Viewing* and *Speaking Parts*, but also Patricia Rozema's *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987) and David Wellington's *I Love a Man in Uniform* (1993). It is a specifically Canadian dilemma to sort out the differences between images imagined for us by ourselves and images imagined for us by other people—let alone making a distinction between all these imaginary images and what we might still want to call, on occasion, the "real world."

> *We're all aware of images that we've seen that chronicle or depict behavioural states that we try to replay. The question of whether or not that renders our actions natural or unnatural lies at the core of my desire to make films.* Atom Egoyan[9]

In Egoyan's *Family Viewing* (1987), his second feature film, video images are everywhere. The film takes as its central theme the desire to make connections—away from false images toward true images, away from pornography toward affection, away from the father toward the mother, and away from the Angloceltic world toward an Armenian world, a large part of which has been lost. Indeed, the central character in this film is called Van—a name that implies links, that requires completion.

Van (Aidan Tierney) lives in a sterile condominium with his father, Stan (David Hemblen), and his father's lover, Sandra (Gabrielle Rose), who appears to be Van's lover as well.[10] Stan likes to videotape all his lovemaking with Sandra although he requires the stimulus of an additional female voice on the telephone to get him started. This voice belongs to Aline (Arsinée Khanjian) who makes her living by offering telephone sex. She is also a friend of Van.

When Van discovers the sexual tapes of Stan and Sandra, he also discovers that his father has been recording over previous tapes of Stan's original family, when the mother and *her* mother were still part of the home and Van was just a child. A section of this childhood tape is returned to again and again in the film, in a kind of Edenic garden, like a prelapsarian dream.

This scene is extraordinarily choreographed. We see Stan at the left of the screen, watching his family in the garden through a window, separated both by glass and by language. Young Van is there, a Mickey Mouse doll clutched to his chest, with his mother and grandmother, talking in Armenian. Stan gives instruction to his son through the window by miming gestures that he wants him to imitate. This moment suggests both continuity between the generations and patriarchal control. Finally, in the fullest version of this scene, the mother brings Van inside to Stan, for whom Van sings "Ba, Ba, Blacksheep" in English. In its recurrence, intensified by ascending string octaves supplied by composer Mychael Danna, this scene haunts the film like a discarded memory of familial affection.

The story of *Family Viewing* centers around Van's repeated attempts to find a proper home for Armen, the grandmother, whom Stan had dumped in a home when his wife ran away. He moves her first to Aline's, then into an unused wing of a hotel in which he is now working, where he finally disguises her as a bag lady, just to keep her away from Stan's clutches.

The penultimate scene intercuts images of Van watching Armen being carted off in an ambulance to some unknown destination with shots of Stan racing up the hotel stairs as if to find Armen, but actually to encounter the memory of his wife, appropriately (if alogically) appearing on a television screen.

The film ends with Aline and Van visiting Armen in a women's hostel. Television cameras are in place as part of a surveillance system, but also, for spectators, to trigger a visual echo of the video memories that we have previously seen. Miraculously, (because again alogically), the mother is also there.

But where are they, really, this reconstructed family? Where will they go? And what will they do? What is the meaning, finally, of the concluding moments in this film? Although Egoyan's work resists simple paraphrase, a few things might be said.

First of all, there is Van's quest, his need to make connections. On this level, the film has a "happy ending." He is there in the frame with his mother and *her* mother and with the young woman, Aline, who is also Armenian and might well become his wife. He has made connections both with the feminine and with his past. He seems to have rediscovered his ancient, ethnic soul, to have encountered his "other," the other that he has always felt was within him.

At the same time, on a social level, what has been accomplished? These characters have all endured a series of displacements in their journey toward this family reunion. They end up, moreover, within the confines of a site more restrictive than any other within the imaginative world constructed by this film.

If the film ends with a mystery, it is a deliberate mystery. Although there are no narrative resolutions for this or for any other Egoyan film, by recapitulating all the visual motifs in these final moments, including the prelapsarian dream, the director can bring his film, formally, to an end.

Speaking Parts (1989) further refines the polyphonic structure of the narrative and continues Egoyan's investigation of images, but now the ubiquity of television images is associated with morbidity and death. The first image we see is of Clara (Gabrielle Rose) walking through a graveyard on her way to a

Viewing situation: Clara (Gabrielle Rose) in *Speaking Parts*

Another viewing situation: Lance (Michael McManus) in *Speaking Parts*

video mausoleum. On each gravestone is a photograph; the mausoleum contains a haunting collection of looped video records of lost loved ones. Throughout the film, we repeatedly see Clara in this mausoleum, reviewing the ghostly footage of her brother—ghostly because he died in the attempt to donate one of his lungs to her and because the footage is eerily without sound.

The opening sequence is intercut with one of Lisa (Arsinée Khanjian) watching a video that is equally eerie because, except for Mychael Danna's music, this moment is also without diegetic sound. The subject of the scene is a piano recital, but that is of little interest to Lisa: the camera of her imagination tracks in past the foreground of the image to isolate a young man sitting in the audience, someone whom we will later know as Lance (Michael McManus)—the obscure object of Lisa's desire.

Egoyan again advances three stories simultaneously, while suggesting links among them—a procedure assisted by the continuity of the music. Lisa is drawn by images of Lance; Clara by images of her dead brother; Lance by the desire to move beyond the image into speech—to achieve a speaking part. Through its visual organization, however, *Speaking Parts* might seem to endorse the voodoo belief that televisual reproductions of the self can behave as the extractor of human souls, that reproductions can rob the self of essence. Certainly, in *Speaking Parts,* the televisual representations consistently lead to a death-desiring nostalgia for something that is either not really there (the indifferent Lance) or no longer there (Clara's dead brother).

Throughout the film, all events are mediated through these televisual representations. The telephone sex in *Family Viewing* becomes television sex in *Speaking Parts.* Everything from orgies to weddings requires a video record. During the wedding sequence, the busy producer is also there—but only on a television monitor. If Lance and Clara employ teleconferencing technology to simulate sex with each other, the producer uses it to maintain the distanced authority of his masculine control.

The penultimate sequence, staged as a television talk show, not only brings together the three narrative units in a kind of cinematic stretto but also collapses the real into the imaginary. As the characters in Egoyan's film momentarily trade places with the

characters in the film being made by the producer, we cannot distinguish reality from representation.

The film ends in silhouette, with Lance collapsed on the floor of Lisa's room—initially reaching out for her only to be rebuffed. Lisa then reaches out for him. Finally, ever so tentatively, they kiss.

Has Lance been so burned out by his involvement with the televisual imaginary that he is prepared to return to the real? Lisa's face now looks softer, her hair less severely drawn back, her attitude perhaps chastened. After all the media interventions, are both now prepared to accept each other as one another's other, as one another's "real"?

> *The most resonant moments for me as a viewer always come when I don't quite know what it is I'm watching. I'm lost in a wash of emotions and feelings that don't originate from something that I can identify immediately. They're the most exhilarating passages in cinema because they come so close to the dream state.* Atom Egoyan[11]

With *The Adjuster* (1991), Egoyan expanded both his palette and his budget. His previous films had been made for virtually no money at all. In Canadian dollars, *Next of Kin* cost $37,000; *Family Viewing* $160,000; *Speaking Parts* (the first to be shot on 35mm) $800,000; but *The Adjuster* was budgeted at $1,500,000—still a modest sum, even by Canadian standards.

The film opens on a close-up of a hand moving within the darkness. The hand belongs to Noah Render (Elias Koteas), the "adjuster" in this film. He floats through life, dealing with the aftermath of fires, shooting arrows into the darkness at the billboards that mark the extremities of the estate on which he resides.

Noah lives with Hera (Arsinée Khanjian), *apparently* his wife. Reinforced by the silence of her sister, Seta (Rose Sarkisyan), who is constantly "in touch with" Hera's son, Simon (Armen Kokorian), Hera seeks to be a center. While Seta and Simon are always holding each other, Hera is often in bed, troubled by unrecallable dreams. Actual, physical touch dominates the film, within and across both gender and generation. The less the characters have a settled sense of their own identities, the more they seem "out-of-touch" both with themselves and with one another.

This extended family inhabits a model home built for an urban subdevelopment that has never taken place. Although the billboards display names like "Sherwood Forest Estate," there is scarcely a tree in sight. If this terrain comments on the speculative insanities of late capitalism, it also creates an atmosphere that is increasingly surreal.

Like the motel which provides the other principal site in this film, the pop-art patterns of its balconies color-coordinated with the parked cars below, the model home suggests impermanence. "Something had to change," says one of Noah's clients later in the film, as she observes the spark that sets her house on fire. "So I watched while it did."

In *The Adjuster*, although fire is a source of trauma for many of the characters, it is also an agent of purgation. Fire eliminates the past futility of their lives. It also projects them into the "ark" of this motel that Noah has arranged for them.[12] Noah is their savior. All his clients love him. As the chambermaid exclaims one evening, "They think you're an angel."

Noah's angelic role, however, is largely impersonation. He has no imagination. He endlessly repeats to all his clients the same professional clichés. "You may not feel it, but you're in a state of shock." In order to value anything, he has to quantify it. He takes photographs. He makes lists. He has to put a price on everything. Questioning a client who had everything destroyed by his fire, even his academic diploma, Noah enquires, "What did it cost to frame?"

Although there is no intimacy at all between him and Hera in the film, he beds all his clients, whether male or female, while discussing their claims. Hera, on the other hand, who as a film censor also makes lists, surreptitiously records all the pornographic films she views for her sister, who stays at home all day looking after Simon. Furthermore, both Seta and Simon are locked within the mute Armenian space of their incomprehension of the English language. In the course of the film, "Bubba" is the only word that Simon acknowledges.[13]

The characters in *The Adjuster* are not what they seem. If they are all acting out parts only partially of their own devising, the potential madness of the imaginary life is centered in the character who is actually named Bubba (Maury Chaykin) and in his companion, Mimi (Gabrielle Rose). Uselessly rich and terminally bored, they try on different roles in the effort to flagellate themselves into a meaningful existence. Like Peter in *Next of Kin*, they pretend. They play games. The games they play, however, lead not to the liberation of self-realization but to a maniacal desire for self-immolation.

All the characters in *The Adjuster* are drained of

initiative through living less within the real than through mediations of the real. While Noah is reluctant to awaken Hera from her sleep when he is in the bedroom with her, he does so on his cellular phone when he is driving away in his car. Although the speechless Seta is unaffected by the pornographic violence of the pirated videotapes, she screams in terror when a flasher appears at her window.

If the film opens with an extreme close-up of Noah's hand, it ends with a shot of his hand held up within the darkness against the flames, as if trying to touch the reality of watching his own house burn down. The final scene is the culmination of the need for touch in this film and of the sense of fire as a necessary purgation. It is complicated, however, by a sudden cut back in time.

Hera and Seta are there, looking distressed. Hera is carrying a baby in her arms, someone too small to be the Simon we have seen. Noah approaches them, as if he had never seen them before, touching Hera tentatively on the shoulder. "Is this your house? I'm an adjuster." Meanwhile, the Arabic sounds of a *duduk* within the plaintive "emotional minimalism" of Mychael Danna's music[14] reinforce the traumatized silence of this Armenian family to suggest the "otherness" which, in *The Adjuster*, has been denied. As Noah holds out his hand to the fire, moving toward the final image, we are left once again with an uncertain sense of the meaning of this film.

Did Noah acquire his family through adjusting their claim? Is he, in fact, married to Hera? Where did Simon come from? While watching the film, we might have imagined that he was also Noah's son. Where lies the reality in what we have just witnessed? Have we just *imagined* what we have seen in this film?

Egoyan has suggested that the most powerful moments in cinema are analogous to dreams, as if wanting his own work to enter directly into consciousness, bypassing intellectual controls. With its absurd objets trouvés, its barren landscapes, and isolated model home—itself both replica and parody of what a true home might be—with the recurring presence of irrational and bizarre moments, *The Adjuster*, more than any other Egoyan film, achieves a surreal force.

Mimi (Gabrielle Rose) and Bubba (Maury Chaykin) in *The Adjuster*

For the Armenian people, churches have a strong significance because they suggest timelessness. In the Armenian psyche, they are objects of adoration unto themselves. They are icons.
Atom Egoyan[15]

Calendar came about by chance; through a prize won at the Moscow Film Festival, Egoyan was given $100,000 to visit Armenia and shoot whatever he wished. The resulting film, shot on 8mm video and 16mm film, is simple in the extreme. Indeed, for spectators who resist the intricate irrationalities of Egoyan's cinema, it is their favorite film. Certainly it is his most accessible.

As money was tight, Egoyan cast himself as the photographer on assignment with his wife (Arsinée Khanjian) and an Armenian driver (Ashot Adamian) to shoot 12 ancient Armenian churches for a photographic calendar. The churches lend to this film not only an enormous beauty but also a spiritual dimension. More deliberately than other Egoyan films, *Calendar* (1993) is about the passing of time and its irretrievable changes.Yet here there is the sense that something will survive the impermanence of relationships and the uncertainty of individual identities.

Because the photographer speaks no Armenian and the driver no English, his wife serves as translator. The photographer is more comfortable with his technology than he is with either his partner or his driver. He likes to point but refuses to touch. When asked to go for a walk with the two of them, the photographer declines. He wants to remain apart. What he really wants, as he explains later in what appears to be a letter to his wife, is to go on standing there, "watching while the two of you leave me and disappear into a landscape that I am about to photograph."

In *Calendar*, we witness the gradual transfer of the wife's affection from her past relationship with the photographer to a future relationship with the driver. At the same time, by choosing the driver, she is also choosing to return to her Armenian roots—an option not available to the photographer, who has been too thoroughly assimilated into North American culture. Furthermore, as we gradually realize, the faded color of the video footage is appropriate for the photographer's fading memory of the Armenian events.

If *Calendar* is concerned with time, it is also concerned with space. Early in the film, referring to the differences between himself and his wife, the increasingly alienated photographer says, "We're both from here; yet being here has made me feel as if I'm from somewhere else."

At the end, when the photographer has returned to Toronto, we can hear his wife on the answering machine—as always with Egoyan, a mediated communication—wanting to explain what has happened to them. She wants to describe the moment when he lost her, when the car was surrounded by sheep and the driver first reached out for her. "He grasped my hand," she explains, "while you grasped your camera. Did you know? Were you there? Are you there?"

I have great suspicions about conveying screen emotion. It's my feeling that it can be too easy to just fix the camera on someone going through emotional turmoil. There's something very disturbing about that for me. Atom Egoyan[16]

As he moves toward greater acceptance, anxious at the same time not to alienate his present-day admirers, Egoyan is finding ways to flesh out more engagingly the characters in his films. Although the Pinteresque non sequiturs still abound and a deadpan detachment continues to inform the acting, there is now a richer sense of psychology. In *Exotica,* the characters elicit our compassion. The film still displays, however, a triadic, polyphonic structure. There are three recurring sites and three different men, each of whom relates to the three women in the film.

First of all, there is the exotic pet shop, inherited by Thomas (Don McKellar) from his mother. We have already seen him smuggling exotic eggs for his shop past the customs officers at the airport at the beginning of the film. Because of this illegal activity, his shop is visited by Francis (Bruce Greenwood), an auditor for the federal tax department. (In the evenings, Thomas also attends an opera house, in which we hear—but do not see—Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. This opera house, however, more European than North American in design and therefore just as "exotic" as the pet shop, is as much a pick-up joint for homosexuals as it is a site for cultural consumption.)

The second major site is that extended grassy field—the "Wyeth" sequence with which I began this essay. In a way structurally similar to the prelapsarian dream in *Family Viewing*, this scene is returned to repeatedly—finally, as a postlapsarian nightmare.

Thirdly, there is Exotica, the strip club presided over by Zoe (Arsinée Khanjian), which she inherited from *her* mother. The club specializes in table danc-

ing, where the men may look but never touch. Eric (Elias Koteas) serves as Master of Ceremonies. From the past, he is also emotionally involved with Christina (Mia Kirshner), the major female character in this film.

Before the opening airport scene, the sequence behind the credits consists of a slow track right along the tropical decor of this club, its exotic nature further emphasized by the eastern strains of Mychael Danna's music, with a *shehnai*, a kind of Indian oboe, sounding unsettlingly unfamiliar to our Western ears.

This exotic club becomes the site of the feminine in this film. It is the center to which all the men are drawn, a place of dreams and desire—even of fertility, since Zoe's pregnancy is very much in evidence. Indeed, if the clients of the club are not allowed to touch the dancers, most visitors to Zoe's womb-like central office are invited to touch her belly—an invitation that is generally accepted with embarrassment.

In *Exotica*, although all of the characters have their grief, it is Francis's story that most securely grips the viewer. It is his pain that spills over to affect the others and to establish the empathetic center of the film.

Francis leads a double life. An auditor by day, he frequents Exotica by night. At the club, he too has developed a special relationship with Christina, largely because she reminds him of the daughter he has lost. Playing upon her youthful appearance, Christina wears a schoolgirl's uniform and displays a sense of great distress during her public performances on stage.

"What gives a schoolgirl her special innocence, gentlemen?" Eric intones into his microphone as Christina dances. "Is it the way that they smell? The sweet perfume of their hair . . . ?" Indeed, as if to *protect* this innocence, Francis mutters private words of concern to Christina when she dances at his table, baring parts of her vulnerable body less for his sensual pleasure than to allay his physical fears. He keeps explaining that he wants to protect her, to save her from harm.

His fears relate to his lost daughter—the object of the search in that extended grassy field. They also relate to Tracey (Sarah Polley), his young niece, who babysits for him as, when she was younger, we eventually learn that "Chrissy" also had done. Yet now, since his daughter is no longer alive, Tracey plays as much a fantasy role in Francis's life at home as Christina does at the club. If the serial structure of the film still involves the repetition of scraps of dialogue and particular events, it also entails an interlinking of these young women, as (at least in Francis's mind) their roles all tend to merge. And if Francis's pain is privileged, it is because he is the most connected with the others. Furthermore, his obsession with the youthful Christina is less pornographic than compassionate; it is an attempt obsessively to recreate moments from his past as if to bring them to a different conclusion—a desire that can never be fulfilled.

Francis pays money to young women to enact his fantasies for him, to create for him an imaginary world; this activity is analogous to the activity that we all indulge in when, as spectators, we go to the movies. In *Exotica*, Egoyan has not relinquished his critique of our obsessive consumption of images.

During the film's final moments, we see a younger Christina, scarcely recognizable—with her braids and braces—as Mia Kirshner, entering the family home. The scene is full of anguish. The assumed security of a family is now felt as a threat.

Why do those Ionic pillars on that four-square home convey such a strong sense of dread? Is it through their implicit assertion of suburban rationality—a rationality inadequate for all the problems in the film? What is Christina's relationship to the later Tracey or, more distressingly, might her destiny one day be the same as Lisa's—the slaughtered child who was finally found, actually by Eric and Christina, in her schoolgirl's uniform in the middle of that extended grassy field?

For Egoyan, has the linear quest of classic Canadian cinema become a circle? Will the characters go on enacting their compulsions over and over again, devising similar imaginary images, only to encounter the very destiny they have been striving to avoid?

> *The films that really excite me are those in which it is unclear if the filmmaker is really aware of how disturbing or moving the image is.* Atom Egoyan[17]

The enduring theme, the evolving theme in all of Egoyan's work is the need for personal transformation. Whether assuming a fictitious identity to escape an unwanted inheritance or descending into fantasy in the effort to combat feelings of pain or failure, Egoyan's characters never feel sufficient being what they are. They simulate. They impersonate. In this sense, they are all in retreat, not just from culture—as

Exotica—the club, in *Exotica*

in the early films—but from nature. Nature seems "natural" only in the old world—in Armenia with its enduring presence of sheep and churches and of people belonging to the earth out of which they have grown.

In North America, within a technologized, urbanized, and increasingly migrant culture, a wondrous stretch of meadow can serve to conceal terrors too horrible to imagine. Nature has become unnatural, as has human nature. It is the fear of the depths of human nature, finally, that either silences Egoyan's characters or drives them into madness—that makes them exiles from themselves.

Within the context of Canadian cinema, Egoyan's earlier films seemed a positive repositioning in relation to our Angloceltic inheritance, a desire to escape the postcolonial uncertainties of the Canadian world. Yet even these films were not revolutionary. They all ended by endorsing the ideology of the family.

As his work has progressed, however, if the concept of alterity remains precise and alluring, the concept of self has become uncertain and obscure. It is as if Egoyan's characters, in their imaginings, have irretrievably abandoned their "originary" home.

At the same time, this desire to transform one's inherited reality parallels the activity of the artist. As Egoyan explains:

> What fascinates me are characters who are very creative but don't know who their audiences are or who have become so aware of the isolating qualities of the creative act that they go a bit mad. And yet, the desire to create is completely comprehensible given what their situations are. Given the traumas in their lives that they've had to deal with, given the things that are left hanging, it's the only thing they can do.[18]

Whatever the forces that motivate Egoyan's own desire to create, over the past ten years he has done so with increasing formal authority. As the demographics of the world continue to shift and change, troubling our sense of who we are and where we belong, we can only wonder how these cultural transitions will be reflected and how new images will be imagined in distinguished films by Atom Egoyan still to come.

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Notes

1. "Emotional Logic: Marc Glassman interviews Atom Egoyan," in *Speaking Parts,* by Atom Egoyan (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1993), p. 48.
2. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, by Margaret Atwood (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 18.
3. "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*" (1965), in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*, by Northrop Frye (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 220.
4. "Coward, Bully, or Clown: The Dream-Life of a Younger Brother," by Robert Fothergill, in *Canadian Film Reader*, ed. Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977), pp. 234–50.
5. For this cultural inheritance, see "The Beginning of a Beginning," by Peter Harcourt, in *Self-Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*, ed. Pierre Véronneau and Piers Handling (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980), pp. 64–76.
6. "Surface Tension," essay by Atom Egoyan, in *Speaking Parts*, p. 36.
7. Ibid., p. 33.
8. Talking with Shelagh Rogers on "The Arts Tonight," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 14 April, 1993.
9. "Emotional Logic," p. 42.
10. The "sterility" of these scenes is visually reinforced by Egoyan's decision to shoot them all in a television studio on one-inch videotape, utilizing video sound.
11. "Emotional Logic," p. 45.
12. For a serious mythological reading, see "The Place of the Spectator," by Danièle Rivière, in *Atom Egoyan*, by Carole Desbarats, Danièle Rivière, Jacinto Lageira, and Paul Virilio, transl. Brian Holmes (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1993), pp. 83–101.
13. Ironically, "Bubba" is an Arabic word for father.
14. Mychael Danna's own description of his musical style. Personal interview with Atom Egoyan in Toronto, 8 March, 1994.
15. Atom Egoyan on "The Arts Tonight," CBC, 14 April, 1993.
16. "Emotional Logic," p. 57.
17. Ibid., p. 52.
18. Personal interview, 8 March, 1994.

Andries Deinum

Andries, who died recently after years of ill health, was the godfather of *Film Quarterly*. Not only did he encourage August Frugé, then the director of the University of California Press, to revive the defunct *Quarterly of Film, Radio and TV* in a new, livelier form, but he was also an influential force on our editorial board. We have missed him during the years when his health would no longer let him join us for meetings, and we salute his memory now that he is gone.

Andries was a Frieslander, proud of his homeland's ancient democratic traditions, who had served in the Dutch underground during World War II. After coming to Hollywood, he had been an assistant to Fritz Lang and ended up teaching film at USC. There he had added to the glory of its football team the distinction of amassing the country's fullest library of film books. But Andries (like many anti-Nazis in Europe) had also had Communist ties, and when these came to light during the McCarthyist hysteria prevalent in 1955, the USC administration fired him. Appreciative students and colleagues protested, but to no avail.

After a time it occurred to August Frugé to ask his friend whether he might like a job at the Press, editing a film quarterly. Andries declined, but he remarked that there was already a film critic on the Press staff—why not ask him? Up to that point, August had known me only as a neophyte jacket blurb writer for the Press's books, and my critical work was obscure—some of it published, as it happened, in the pages of the old *Quarterly*. But in his mysterious way he decided to try me out as an editor, and together we developed a scheme for a magazine inspired by many of Andries's ideas. Despite the fact that by then Andries had been given a position teaching film at Portland State University in Oregon, which thereby gained his fierce loyalty, he agreed to fly down to California regularly for board meetings. Andries had worked with the great Dutch documentarist Joris Ivens. Like others of us connected with the new publication, he believed that documentary had a unique power to reflect and thus improve the human condition; *Film Quarterly* has always honored documentary as a vibrant branch of the art. As a European, Andries had cultural horizons much broader than those prevailing in Hollywood, so his cosmopolitanism helped us to maintain a broad focus on film as a world art form. Moreover, his unfailing courtesy even amid vigorous disagreement helped set the collaborative tenor that the board has maintained through the years. He lost some arguments; for example, although Andries distrusted interviews as occasions for film-makers to pontificate and dissemble, he accepted cheerfully the fact that the rest of us felt that interviews could be useful—and in fact virtually every issue of the journal has contained an interview. But in basics, *Film Quarterly* continues to bear the mark of his intelligence, enthusiasm, and commitment.

—Ernest Callenbach, *FQ* Editor 1958–1991

Marek Haltof

A Fistful of Dollars

Polish Cinema after the 1989 Freedom Shock

It seems as if we have started to believe in freedom. And immediately felt disappointed with it.

—Tadeusz Sobolewski[1]

The year 1989 was a turning point not only in Polish history but also for the Polish film industry. The state-controlled and -owned industry was transformed into independent studios/companies which could now make their own decisions about finances and production. The year 1990 brought another important and long-awaited decision: the abolition of censorship. Film producers and directors became responsible for both the content and the financial success, or failure, of their products. On one hand, this decision gave film companies considerable freedom in the sphere of coproduction and distribution in the West. On the other, in spite of limited government subsidies during the transition period, this independence forced them to concentrate on the commercial aspect of their productions.

As a consequence of these recent political transformations, hidden archives and victimized dissidents no longer constitute the Polish "film landscape." The last banned film, Ryszard Bugajski's *Przesłuchanie* (*Interrogation*, 1982), was released in 1990 following the distribution of other "shelved" films dealing mostly with the psychosocial pressures of Stalinism, such as Jerzy Domaradzki's *Wielki bieg* (*Great Race*, 1981), Agnieszka Holland's *Kobieta samotna* (*A Lonely Woman*, 1981), Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Przypadek* (*Blind Chance*, 1981), and Janusz Zaorski's *Matka Królów* (*Mother of Kings*, 1982). But by the time of their release, some of these temporally dislodged films had lost much of their artistic impetus.

Interrogation, Blind Chance, and other political films of the early 1980s are members of a dead class; political metaphors and symbols prevalent before 1989 no longer dominate the industry. Film-making has ceased to be a national and social mission and has once again become a strictly professional endeavor. Rather than being "more than cinema," it has now shrunk (without negative connotation) to being "simply cinema," and exists somewhere on the margins of Polish life.

For many film-makers the new reality after 1989 comes as something of a shock; the relationship between the state and the artist as well as between the audience and the artist has changed dramatically.[2] The traditional antagonist, the totalitarian state, has disappeared, and with it a polarized world with the only meaningful distinction made between "Them" and "Us."[3] At present, film ideology is of minor significance and will remain so until a new antagonist is found. Film-makers now have to defend themselves

exclusively with their films. They have to fight for audiences; they depend on them. State-run political censorship has been replaced by the economic censorship of the producer, which, in many aspects, is even harsher. Disappointed with the first flood of commercially minded products, some film-makers have gone so far as to emphasize the positive role of state censorship in the totalitarian period.[4] Kazimierz Kutz, one of the best film-makers of the Polish School generation, asserts that political censorship was one of the main factors behind the origins of artistic cinema in Poland. He maintains that there were some positive aspects to political censorship which motivated the best artists to work harder and to speak in purely visual terms. For him, this laid the foundation of the Polish School of Film-making in the 1950s and early 1960s. According to Andrzej Wajda, the figurativeness of Polish cinema was one of the crucial elements in its fight with political censorship. In contrast to dialogues, symbolic pictures are very difficult to censor, he claims, giving examples from his classic *Popiół i diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*, 1958).[5] At present, some fear that the rich visual style often associated with Polish cinema may end up the loser.

Given the complexity of Polish history, cinema (and, for that matter, all art), has generally been regarded as more than just entertainment. It commented on political and social issues and was frequently the only forum where vital questions could be addressed. The artist's "mission" was that of a prophet and teacher. Film and other art forms performed the role of safety valves in the controlled, corrupt political system. Artists felt an immense responsibility. Conversely, they were also accustomed to a situation in which their voices were heard and analyzed by the people and by the authorities. At present, economics supersede politics; the only problem for the Polish film industry is money. New audiences demand new films. The marginalization of traditional filmic themes like Polish martyrology and history proves that the time has come for the Polish cinema to be free from political and social obligations. But "free from what?" asks Wajda in his diagnosis of the state of Polish cinema in this changed political, economic, and social situation, and concludes ironically: Free from the audience, criticism, authority, ideology, and artistic criteria.[6]

Polish cinema has familiarized audiences with its

Jan Frycz (right) and Artur Barciś in Andrej Barański's *Two Moons*

explicit (on the screen) or implicit (in the viewer's mind) political context. Since the internationally acclaimed *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*, 1976), by Wajda, other films dealing with the Stalinist era were made in Poland. In the late seventies, for instance, the corrupting side of Communism was explored in a group of films unhappily called The Cinema of Moral Concern (Kino moralnego niepokoju).

The "post-totalitarian" period is characterized by an attempt to overcome the ways of thinking and habits of the preceding phase. Furthermore, Polish audiences, historically having favored political films, seem to have grown tired of the political. The artistic and commercial success of Wojciech Marczewski's *Ucieczka z kina 'Wolność'* (*Escape from 'Freedom' Cinema*, 1989) is merely an exception to the rule that, at the moment, political films dealing with the recent past no longer seem to be marketable in Poland. Political films on the themes of immorality and corruption made in the 1990s, but in the style of 1980s productions, have been both commercial and artistic failures. Filip Bajon's *Bal na dworcu w Koluszkach* (*Ball at Koluszki Station*, 1990), Feliks Falk's *Koniec gry* (*End of the Game*, 1991), Waldemar Krzystek's *Ostatni prom* (*The Last Ferry*, 1989), and particularly Tadeusz Trzos-Rastawiecki's *Po upadku* (*After the Fall*, 1990) were made too late; viewed after 1989, they lost much of their relevance and, as a result, their audience. Given the current reality, problems experienced under martial law seem to be outdated. Wajda's last film, in a sense an appendix to *Ashes and Diamonds*, *Pierścionek z orłem w koronie* (*The Ring with a Crowned Eagle*, 1992), must also be regarded as a failure.

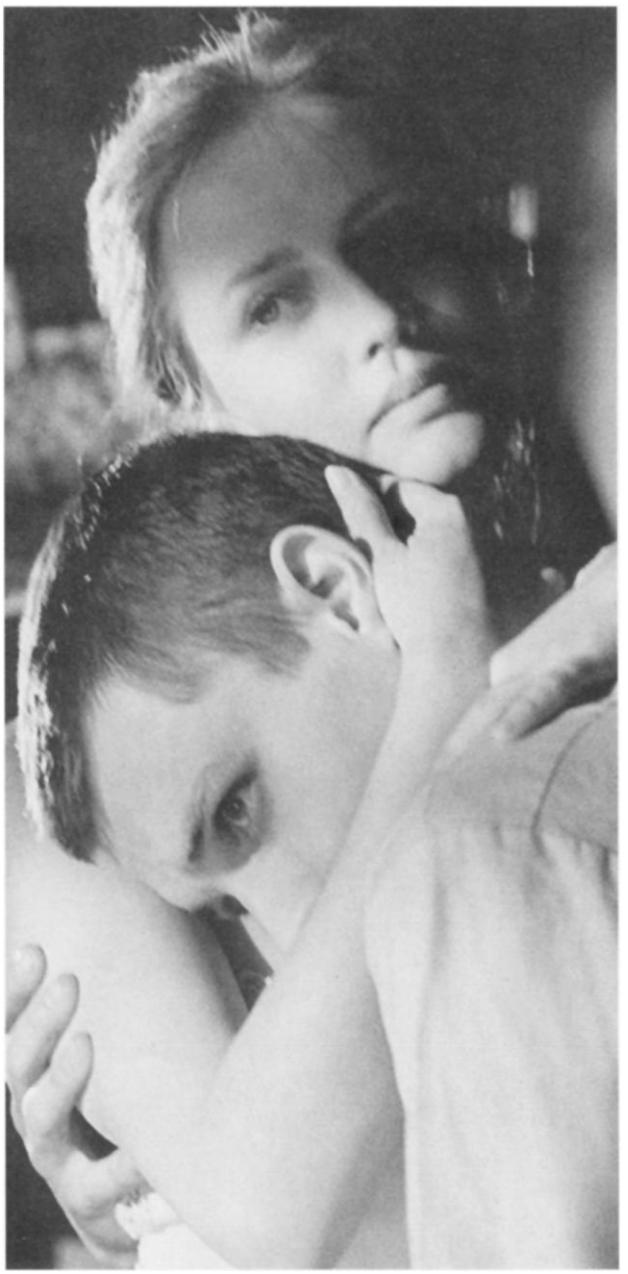
On the other hand, there are memorable films dealing with post-World War II reality, the events of 1968, and martial law, such as those made by Maciej Dejczer, the author of *300 mil do nieba* (*300 Miles to Heaven*, 1989), Krzystek, *Wzawieszeniu (Suspended,* 1989), Janusz Kijowski, *Stan strachu* (*State of Terror*, 1990), and Radosław Piwowarski, *Marcowe migdały* (*March Almonds*, 1990).

Piwowarski's film focuses on "the Jewish problem" in 1968 and is told in the lyrical style already seen in the director's earlier films like *Yesterday* (1984), which deals with the Beatles phenomenon in Poland. In both films Piwowarski focuses on coming-of-age problems in a small provincial town against the backdrop of the political atmosphere of the late 1960s. The peaceful life of the small town ends abruptly with the intrusion of politics. Though marginalized and ridiculed, politics overshadows the characters' lives. Generational conflicts merge with political ones. One

Krystyna Janda in Ryszard Bugajski's *Interrogation*

of the protagonists, Marcyś (Piotr Siwkiewicz), is of Jewish origin and is forced, eventually, to leave the country with his father.

March Almonds is a nostalgia film for the 1960s (Piwowarski's) generation; at the film's end, the song "Ta nasza młodość" ("This Is Our Youth") is heard and brief postscripts of the fates of the nonfictional characters who inspired their screen counterparts pass across the screen. The atmosphere created by *March Almonds* resembles that of some Czech films of the sixties; the characters are likeable, warm, mildly grotesque, but not villainous. Piwowarski's films, in spite of his dangerous tendency to sentimentalize, may



Agnieszka Wagner and Marek Bukowski
in Filip Zylber's *Farewell to Maria*

serve as good examples of new political films in that, contrary to pre-1989 works, they do not personify history and avoid martyrological gestures and clear divisions between good and bad.

Dejczer's *300 Miles to Heaven*, scripted by him with Cezary Harasimowicz, won the European Film Award (Felix) in 1989 as the "Young European Film of the Year." This well-structured and moving film is based on real events and tells the story of two young brothers who escape to Denmark hidden on the underside of a huge truck. The first part of the film portrays a hopeless picture of Polish "socialist" reality—the ugliness of the environment, corruption, futile struggles with authorities—and serves as justification for the boys' desperate departure from the country in order to help their parents. In spite of the danger inherent in such topics, Dejczer avoids cheap sentimentality. The second part of the film shows the two alienated teenage protagonists in prosperous, though cold, "capitalist" landscapes. The final scene, a telephone conversation between the two boys and their parents in Poland, is one of the most powerful sequences in Polish cinema. "Don't ever return here," their father says. This cruel sentence might serve as a strong criticism of the Communist regime.

Films dealing with Polish politics and history customarily were and are now supported by the critics. Two recent major award winners at the Gdańsk Film Festival, Robert Gliński's *Wszystko, co najważniejsze* (*Everything of Utmost Importance*, 1992) and Grzegorz Królikiewicz's *Przypadek Pekosińskiego* (*The Case of Pekosiński*, 1993), show the critics' consistent preference for films focusing on Polish history. Gliński's film tells of the fate of Polish citizens deported by Stalin to Kazakstan after the outbreak of World War II. In Królikiewicz's work, Polish history is seen through the eyes of a handicapped person searching unsuccessfully for his unknown mother.

Given the difficulties of the transitional period, it is worth noting that the Polish film industry has been able to produce approximately 30 feature films almost every year since 1989. At present, a large number of Polish films are made as coproductions with foreign producers. A new market is coming into being. Kazimierz Kutz, nevertheless, maintains that the quality of Polish cinema has reached rock bottom; instead of having financially and thematically Polish productions, the country is being flooded by anonymous international coproductions.[7]

The discussion about the future of the Polish film industry vacillates between voices emphasizing the importance of the national character of Polish films and those advocating the universal, cosmopolitan nature of art. Taking the first perspective, Polish film critic and writer Anita Skwara states that "Polish cinema stands a chance of survival and development only when it is national in character, when it arises directly from the traditions, culture and myths forming Polish awareness."[8] Some directors, however, show their determination to go beyond the limits of narrowly understood "national themes" or "Polish perspective"

and focus on what can be called "a European consciousness."[9] The popular slogan in Poland, "catching up with Europe," expresses a desire to create new post-totalitarian art which, while addressing some universal issues, will reflect national uniqueness.

There are claims, supported by leading Polish film-makers such as Andrzej Wajda and Krzysztof Zanussi, that Polish cinema is in danger of becoming commercialized, especially since Western distributors have entered the Polish market. Some believe that free-market reforms will create a situation in which Polish films cannot compete with Western "B" products such as the collected works of Chuck Norris. Another concern is the feigned reorientation of Polish film-makers toward commercialism. For many critics and film-makers, the specter of commercialism still haunts Polish cinema.

Polish "popular" cinema prior to 1989, usually cheap imitations of the Hollywood genres, was rarely well received or artistically sound. Moreover, it was never supported or treated seriously by film critics looking for great authors dealing with great themes. As a consequence, comedy, horror, and science-fiction films were marginalized. This type of cinema, though supported by the audience, never constituted a distinct part of local film production.

The lack of a popular cinema tradition in Poland is clearly emphasized by the title of Skwara's essay: "Film Stars Do Not Shine in the Sky over Poland: The Absence of Popular Cinema in Poland."[10] There was no place for commercial cinema within the framework of socialist art. The film's task was to communicate, educate, and perform other social duties. The poet/writer Adam Zagajewski explains the absence of one Polish popular genre: "Crime stories are impossible here. You always know who the culprit is: the state."[11]

A few attempts to make deliberately commercial films in the late 1980s brought some miserable results, for instance, *Zabij mnie, glino* (*Kill Me, Pig*, 1988), or *Sztuka kochania* (*The Art of Love*, 1989). This trend has continued in recent years. Intended as commercial endeavours, some of the films of formerly respected, artistically inclined directors have been both artistic and commercial failures, like Barbara Sass-Zdort's *Pajęczarki* (*Spider Women*, 1992) and Janusz Zaorski's *Panny i wdowy* (*Maidens and Widows*, 1991). The first film, intended as comedy, is awkwardly directed and lacks coherence; the second offers a naïve and clichéd view of Polish history in an equally anachronistic manner.

Fortunately, there are some exceptions. Marek Piestrak's reworking of the traditional horror formula in *Powrót Wilczycy* (*Return of the She-Wolf*, 1990) and Juliusz Machulski's films, from his very well-received debut, *Vabank* (*Va banque*, 1981), to his recent *Kingsajz* (*King Size*, 1989), *Déjà vu* (1989), and *V.I.P.* (1991), employ American genre models intelligently and showcase the highly professional skills of the directors. Single films by other directors have also enjoyed both commercial and critical success—Jerzy Domaradzki's *Łuk Erosa* (*Cupid's Bow*, 1989), Jan Łomnicki's *Wielka wsypa* (*The Big Give-Away*,

Mariusz Jakus in Feliks Falk's *Lawlessness*

1992), *Lepiej być piękną i bogatą* (*It's Better to Be Beautiful and Rich*, 1993), by Bajon, and, finally, Piwowarski's *Kolejność uczuć* (*The Order of Feelings*, 1993), awarded first prize *ex aequo* with Królikiewicz's *The Case of Pekosiński* at the 1993 Festival of Polish Films in Gdańsk.

Piwowarski and Bajon, in particular, have succeeded in making popular films not only popular but also intelligent and apt. Piwowarski's *The Order of Feelings,* a romantic comedy, tells the story of a famous aging actor (played by Daniel Olbrychski) who comes to a provincial theatre in Silesia to direct *Romeo and Juliet* and subsequently has a romance with a teenager, Julia. The love story is set, atypically, against the background of industrial Silesia. This lyrical but unsentimental film (at times reminiscent of American romantic screwball comedies of the 1940s and 1950s) plays with Olbrychski's own star persona, which he created in the late 1960s and the 1970s. His performance, a near mockery of "Olbrych-ski," also comes as a refreshing turn in his career.

Since his first feature film, *Aria dla atlety* (*Aria for an Athlete*, 1979), Filip Bajon has made a number of highly original, artistically pleasing films. His recent film, *Lepiej być piękną i bogatą* (*It's Better to Be Beautiful and Rich*), a modern version of the Cinderella story with a distinctly Polish flavor, is his first venture—and it is a successful one—into mainstream commercial cinema. His young female protagonist, a weaver (Adrianna Biedrzyńska), works in a declining factory that is permanently on strike. One day, she learns that she has inherited the factory. The implausible becomes possible in the film, which meanders lightly toward an unavoidable final happy ending with implicit mockery of popular films about success stories.

The film has two layers: a melodramatic plot of a success story and an ironic commentary on both the new Polish dream of becoming rich overnight and Polish stereotypical images of the West and of the "Wild East" (Ukraine).[12] The film features a number of excellent Polish actors, among others Daniel Olbrychski, Anna Prucnal, Bronisław Pawlik, and Marek Kondrat, who act (perhaps overact) in the manner of American prime-time television productions. The music and flamboyant photography emphasize the fairy tale-like aspect of the film.

In Polish cinema, comedy was never an important genre. The atmosphere of Polish films was solemn and serious, in keeping with the topics presented in these films: politics, social issues, Polish history. But Sylwester Chęciński's 1991 film about the introduction of martial law, *Rozmowy kontrolowane* (*Controlled Conversations*), a fine comedy scripted by a former contributor to Stanisław Bareja's comedies,[13] Stanisław Tym, brings some hope that in Poland it may finally be possible to laugh at matters normally reserved for serious treatment.[14] The film is set shortly before and after the implementation of martial law in Poland but, what is new, mocks both sides. The protagonist (played by Tym himself), entangled in events beyond his control, unwillingly becomes a hero of the underground Solidarity movement. His undeserved fame spreads. Chęciński's mockery of heroism Polish-style and worn-out romantic gestures belongs to the tradition started by Andrzej Munk's antiheroic *Eroica* (1957). The likeable hero of *Controlled Conversations* might be one of Jaroslav Hasek's characters involved in farcical adventures in the somber reality of the early 1980s in Poland. Unlike the Good Soldier Schweik, however, there is no ambiguity about him; he is a simple-minded, career-seeking individual, a product and a victim of the system.

Two later films, though lacking the strength of Chęciński's work, deal with similar issues in a similar fashion. Marek Piwowski's uneven *Uprowadzenie Agaty* (*The Kidnapping of Agata*, 1993), based on a true story about a politician who abuses his power to get rid of his daughter's lover, is equally irreverent. The objects of laughter and mockery are the new political situation, hastily created political elites, and the Catholic Church. Piwowski's film, however, in spite of its satirical and comic potential, ultimately loses its impetus and turns out to be a collection of humorous yet disconnected and visually dry cabaret sketches.

Konrad Szołajski's *Człowiek z . . .* (*Man of . . .*, 1993) goes so far as to mock Wajda's *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron* and ridicule the "men of styrofoam," the descendants of brave dissidents turned new-style apparatchiks. Apart from direct references to Wajda's films, including the famous *Ashes and Diamonds*, this sadly ineffective film tries to ridicule the current state of affairs, which is portrayed as corrupt, manipulated, and hopeless. In this world there are no ideas and no protagonist to identify with.

The poetics of American genre films transplanted to Polish reality is seen at its best in recent Polish action films: Wojciech Wójcik's *Zabić na końcu* (*To Kill at the End*, 1990), Łomnicki's *Wielka wsypa* (*The Big Give-away*, 1992), Jacek Skalski's *Miasto*

prywatne (*The Private Town*, 1993), Falk's *Samowolka* (*Lawlessness*, 1993), and, in particular, Władysław Pasikowski's *Kroll* (1991), *Psy* (*The Pigs*, 1992), and *Psy 2—Ostatnia krew* (*Pigs 2—The Last Blood*, 1994). Pasikowski's films serve as the best examples of what many critics may perceive as a threat to a national cinema that needs to speak in a discrete Polish idiom. Others, myself included, see these films as a chance to rejuvenate Polish film, to make it absorbing and well narrated. Pasikowski draws heavily upon the formulas of American police/gangster films and transfers them to the political situation in Poland in 1989. Fast-action films Pasikowski-style are something new in Polish cinema, but Polish audiences are well prepared after their exposure to innumerable American action films, albeit mostly on video. In terms of box office, *The Pigs* is the most successful Polish film of the 1990s, effectively competing with American action films.

In *The Pigs,* Pasikowski quotes extensively from Ridley Scott and other makers of quality action films. From the first scene, the viewer encounters similar locations (luxurious interiors, rainy streets, the final scene in, of course, a deserted factory), car chases, excessive violence, vulgar language, tough men and their misogynistic attitudes. The mise-en-scène is distinctly American; there are American references in nearly every scene, and yet, strangely enough, this film is "very Polish." Pasikowski shows Poland in a process of transition from one political system to another, where all principles are shaken and everything is possible. His protagonist, Franc Maurer (memorably played by Bogusław Linda), a member of the secret police, tries to survive in an age of "verifications," lost privileges, and his own personal problems. Truth and falsehood coexist in this world; it is impossible to distinguish between them. "Commissions change but you remain at their head," the protagonist tells the cunning chairman of the verification committee.

In his films Pasikowski also shows a degraded world with clichéd women characters. His clichés, however, have to do more with American stereotyping from police films than with stereotypes of female characters in Polish films. Piotr Szulkin, who himself contributes to this discussion with his breakthrough film, *Femina* (1990), points out that women in Polish films "never had time for love because they were busily making national banners."[15] Pasikowski is not interested in this aspect of Polishness; his films are also devoid of notions such as love, friendship, loyalty. Like some of their American counterparts, *Kroll* and *The Pigs* represent female characters as voiceless

Franciszek Pieczka in Jan Jakub Kolski's *Jańcio of the Water*

figures who people a male-dominated landscape. Their task, however, is no longer to "stand behind their men," but to find a place for themselves in a ruthless world where only their sexuality matters.

Pasikowski is still searching for his own film language, though he employs ready-made formulas. His films, which, to a certain degree, are accomplished pastiches, already show signs of great talent.

Falk's *Lawlessness* deals with the same topic as *Kroll.* The popularity of both films is partly due to their exploration of realms until recently off limits to any negative portrayal. Falk, one of the leading filmmakers of the "Cinema of Moral Concern" generation, goes further than Pasikowski with his dark portrayal of a formerly taboo topic: the military. The vulgar language of the screen protagonists parallels unrefined reality based on corruption, depravation, and

Bogusław Linda in Władysław Pasikowski's *The Pigs*

primitive indoctrination. The film is organized around the conflict between new soldiers and the old guard about to retire from active duty. The older soldiers, led by a criminal nicknamed Tygrys (Tiger), rule the garrison and drill the newcomers so as to take revenge for their own earlier humilation. Everything happens with the silent approval of the officers.

Compared with Western cinema, Falk's film seems to lack originality and overflow with clichés, but its importance lies in its acceptance of "outside" influences and its skill in interweaving them with a distinctly Polish predicament. Given the situation before 1989, in which institutions like the military and the police were protected against all forms of criticism, it comes as no surprise that films by Pasikowski and Falk are warmly received by the Polish audience.

New Polish cinema also originates with authors whose world vision and film poetics differ markedly from that of Pasikowski. There is a low-budget (the term has nothing to do with quality, but rather with the film's scope) personal cinema which deals with "provincial" Poland and the small, "insignificant" characters populating this landscape. Andrzej Barański, of *Kobieta z provincji* (*The Woman from the Provinces*, 1985) fame, has made several notable films in the 1990s: *Kramarz* (*The Peddler*, 1990), *Nad rzeką, której nie ma* (*On the River That Doesn't Exist*, 1991), *Kawalerskie życie na obczyźnie* (*A Bachelor's Life Abroad*, 1992), and *Dwa księżyce* (*Two Moons*, 1993). The protagonists of his films live outside of history; they are not political animals but simple people whose often banal and uneventful lives are limited to their village, a small town, a marginal profession. Their aspirations follow suit. They do, however, possess their dignity when fighting everyday reality, surviving day by day. Barański shows his protagonists' lives as heroic, tough but charming. In spite of some apparent affinities, Barański's photographic version of "Small Realism" has nothing to do with the Czech school of the sixties; his sense of humor as well as his viewpoint differ from Forman's or Menzel's early films. Unlike these directors, Barański is not a storyteller but a philosopher interested in the humdrum nature of everyday life.

Jan Jakub Kolski, with his *Pogrzeb kartofla* (*Burying the Potato*, 1990), *Pograbek* (1992), *Jańcio Wodnik* (*Jańcio of the Water*, 1993), and *Cudowne miejsce* (*Miraculous Place*, 1994), is another important, newly emerging auteur in contemporary Polish cinema. His slow-paced films, with superb cinematography and fine acting, particularly from Stanisław Pieczka and Grażyna Błęcka-Kolska (the director's wife), resemble in atmosphere Witold Leszczyński's classic *Żywot Mateusza* (*The Life of Matthew*, 1968). Like Leszczyński, Kolski portrays mythologized rural communities. These are not, however, "rural films" but films set in rural environments; the problems they touch upon have universal appeal.

In Kolski's first film, *Burying the Potato*, which combines poetic metaphors with grotesque images of Polish postwar reality, a former concentration camp prisoner faces a hostile village after his unexpected and unwanted return. The village has already taken possession of his belongings and is after his land. His struggle for acceptance, not political reality, is the essence of the film. Here and in his later films, Kolski is interested in oversensitive, weird, and marginalized characters whose world is limited to their village and ends with the horizon. Kolski's down-to-earth yet multidimensional protagonists experience mystery by being close to nature. Political comments gradually disappear from Kolski's later films, replaced by metaphysical meditation and folk wisdom combined with his unique version of lyricism. *Jańcio of the Water*, arguably Kolski's best film, is the essence of his stylized, poetic, perhaps magic, realism. The film deals with a village thinker blessed with miraculous abilities who leaves his secluded village for a depraved world. This will change his life forever, endanger his marriage to his faithful Weronka, and bring unhappiness to him and those close to him. In telling this unusual parable, Kolski reveals great passion; we are dealing with a young film-maker of great potential and artistic integrity.

Wojciech Nowak's *Śmierć dzieciorobа* (*Death of the Kidsmaker*, 1991) belongs to a different kind of realism. His film is a cruel, merciless picture of the province previously examined by Barański and Kolski. The reality he presents is loathsome, populated by grotesque, vulgar characters. Ugliness dominates the screen. The film's protagonist, a provincial Don Juan, Januszek (Marek Kasprzyk), refuses to marry a pregnant security officer's daughter. His refusal is not a nonconformist act, not a Don Juan's revolt, nor a political gesture; instead he is at pains to emphasize his separation from a world he despises but of which he is paradoxically a part. The film's mise-en-scène stresses the ugliness and trashy character of a degraded world. This black vision of reality prompted one reviewer to claim that *Death of the Kidsmaker* is a new Polish film about love.[16]

In the shadow of Poland's internationally known film-makers, Barbara Sass-Zdort, the best woman director now working in Poland, has developed her own personal style. She started her feature career with *Bez miłości* (*Without Love*, 1980). Following the success of this film, she developed a body of work characterized by thematic unity and a simple, documentarylike visual style. Like Márta Mészáros of Hungary, Sass-Zdort presents a feminist perspective and confronts issues largely ignored in overtly political Central Europe: the plight of women and gender relations. In recent years she has completed two critically acclaimed films, *Historia niemoralna* (*An Immoral Story*, 1990) and *Tylko strach* (*Only Fear*, 1993). Though Sass-Zdort objects to narrow feminist inter-

Daniel Olbrychski and Maria Seweryn in Radosław Piwowarski's *The Order of Feelings*

Anna Dymna (right) and Dorota Segda in Barbara Sass-Zdort's *The Fear*

pretation of her films, her works—given her manifest interest in feminist issues—almost force critics to take this perspective. Sass-Zdort's artistic output, largely unknown in the West and undervalued in her own country, requires more careful examination.

Apart from old masters like Wajda, Kutz, and Zanussi, who are artistically active[17] and have their faithful audience, a new cinema and new names are surfacing. Mariusz Trelinski with his *Pożegnanie jesieni* (*Farewell Autumn*, 1989), 1993 newcomers such as Łukasz Wylężałek (*Balanga*), Filip Zylber (*Pożegnanie z Marią*, *Farewell to Maria*), Mariusz Grzegorzek (*Rozmowa z człowiekiem z szafy*, *Conversation with a Person in a Wardrobe*), 1994 newcomer Michał Rosa (*Gorący czwartek, Hot Thursday*), and others, will shape the future of Polish cinema. If debuts testify to the rank and health of any national cinema, then the current state of Polish cinema is not as dark as frequently portrayed.

Zylber's *Farewell to Maria*, based on Tadeusz Borowski short stories, differs from other films dealing with the occupation, the war, and "the Jewish question." Jazz compositions by Tomasz Stańko and sophisticated, stylized photography by Dariusz Kuc stress the morbid melancholy initially introduced by overtly edifying dialogues about love, war, and poetry. Slow-motion photography, used consistently throughout the film, functions here not as a clichéd cinematic device but as a means of building atmosphere. The war hangs over the characters and foreshadows the tragic ending.

Another very well-received debut, Grzegorzek's *Conversation with a Person in a Wardrobe*, examines an unusual case of sick motherly love, isolation, and rejection. In the opening scene in a mortuary that sets the whole tone of the film, the protagonist (Bożena Adamek) goes into labor while identifying her husband's body. She isolates herself and her son, Karol, from the outside world. Karol grows up alienated, paranoid, and wild. Finally, she leaves her totally dependent seventeen-year-old son to take up with a lover. Karol is passed on to a special institution in which he learns basic life skills and painfully enters adult life. Slow camera work, voice-over narration, and attention to detail set the mood for this unusual film.

The change towards a market economy in Poland coincides with the domination of coproductions in Europe and the incorporation of American popular cinema into that market. The end of the era of a subsidized, centralized Polish film industry controlled through state censorship and the emergence of a new audience for whom not only Communism but also Solidarity are history bring some inevitable changes to film production and distribution as well as to film

thematics and stylistics. Coproductions, multinational enterprises, competition with Hollywood, a plurality of styles and genres, and the new challenge of fighting for the viewer are changing the Polish film landscape. Consequently, the privileged position of many artists engaged in anti-Communist endeavours (and, for that matter, of film-making in general), is on the margin of Polish life. Emerging auteurs like Barański and Kolski defend themselves purely with their films.

Contrary to many dark prognoses, the current situation in Polish film shows no signs of crisis, but rather indicates a changing of the guard, a generational transformation taking place in an age of transition from one political system to another. In the time of considerable political openness, in which (almost) everything can be said publicly, the double talk and subversive messages provided by the old Polish cinema are no longer needed. The current situation in Polish cinema indicates that after a brief period of "freedom shock," the problem facing new cinema, not only in Poland but in all of East-Central Europe, is to find a new voice to adequately express the "national" while incorporating other cinematic discourses.

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Notes

1. Tadeusz Sobolewski, "Filmy polskie mówią: w tym kraju nic się nie zmieni" ("Polish Films Say: Nothing Will Change in this Country"), a statement by the Polish critic at the Forum of the Polish Filmmakers Association in Gdynia 1991, published in *Kino* 1 (1992), p. 2.
2. The self-imposed limitation of this text—to a comparison of the new films with their predecessors and to a discussion of the relationship between the "national," distinctively Polish and the widespread influence of Hollywood—explains the absence in it of Polish film-makers making their films abroad, such as two internationally renowned figures: Agnieszka Holland and Krzysztof Kieślowski. After making films in Poland, e.g., her powerful *Kobieta samotna (A Lonely Woman)*, Holland's German-made film, *Gorzkie żniwa (Angry Harvest,* 1985), received an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Film. Her *Europa, Europa* (1991, a Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film), *Oliver, Oliver* (1992), and *Secret Garden* (1993) are amongst the most popular and critically acclaimed films of recent times. Kieślowski's *Decalogue* (1988), a ten-part series of television films loosely based on the Bible's Ten Commandments, was hailed as a great achievement and incontestably placed its director in the world of renowned filmic authors. *Krótki film o zabijaniu* (*A Short Film About Killing*) and *Krótki film o miłości (A Short Film About Love*), the extended feature versions of two parts of *Decalogue*, were exceptionally well received, particularly in France. Kieślowski's new films, *Podwójne życie Weroniki* (*The Double Life of Véronique*, 1991) and his trilogy, *Three Colors: Blue, White,* and *Red* (1993/1994) consolidated his position as a distinguished auteur.
3. Artistic criteria in Poland were subordinated to political ones. The black (red?) and white division between the "pro-Communist side" ("Them") and the "right side" ("Us") dominated Polish artistic life in the two decades up until 1989. To be a dissident meant being a true artist; some artists were canonized simply because their work was incompatible with the Communist system. For some, being on the right (dissident) side was enough to be hailed as a great artist. In a sense, it was an anachronistic, very romantic Polish extension of the artist-as-torchbearer myth. In this context, the quality of artistic output was frequently of minor importance.
4. See the special edition of *Reżyser* (*Film Director*), "Tren na śmierć cenzora" ("Lament on the Death of a Censor"), 11 (1992), pp. 1–8. Published with *Kino* 11 (1992). Also an interview with film writer and film-maker Tadeusz Konwicki: "Wróżby z dnia dzisiejszego" ("Predictions of Today"), *Kino* 1 (1991), pp. 5–6.
5. "Tren na śmierć cenzora," p. 2.
6. "Kino polskie: Szok wolności" ("Polish Film—Freedom Shock"), *Kino* 1 (1992), pp. 3–5.
7. "Co z polskim kinem?" ("What About Polish Cinema?"), *Kino* 11 (1992), p. 21.
8. Anita Skwara, "Film Stars Do Not Shine in the Sky over Poland: The Absence of Popular Cinema in Poland," in *Popular European Cinema*, ed. Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 230.
9. See, for instance, Krzysztof Zanussi's comment, "Obrona kosmopolityzmu" ("A Defense of Cosmopolitanism"), in *Kino* 2 (1992), pp. 16–18.
10. Skwara, pp. 220–31.
11. Adam Zagajewski, *Solidarność i samotność* (*Solidarity and Loneliness*), (Paris: Editions Spotkania, 1986). Quoted in Skwara, p. 229.
12. Strangely enough, Bajon's film is a Polish, French, and Ukrainian coproduction.
13. In the works of Stanisław Bareja, generally undervalued both then and now, the absurdity of Polish life was, most probably, accurately reflected. His absurdist satires of "socialist" life, for instance *Co mi zrobisz jak mnie złapiesz* (*What Will You Do with Me When You Catch Me*, 1975) or *Miś* (*Teddy Bear*, 1981), say more about that period than the whole cinema of "social concern" from the seventies.
14. The 1994 Polish feature film festival winner, *Zawrócony* (*The Turned Back*), a comedy by Kazimierz Kutz, deals with similar issues narrated in a similar manner.
15. Manana Chyb, "Otoczony przez niemych Maurów. Rozmowa z Piotrem Szulkinem" ("Surrounded by Mute Moors. An Interview with Piotr Szulkin"), *Kino* 4 (1992), p. 3.
16. Jerzy Krysiak, "Bunt Don Juana" ("Don Juan's Revolt"), *Konkurs* 4/5 (1991), p. 6.
17. e.g., Wajda's *The Ring with a Crowned Eagle*, Zanussi's *Dotknięcie ręki* (*The Touch*, 1992), and Kutz's *Śmierć jak kromka chleba* (*Death As a Slice of Bread*, 1994).

Meeting Two Queens: Dietrich sheds a tear (from *Blonde Venus*) that dissolves into an image of Garbo's face

Mary Desjardins

Meeting Two Queens

Feminist Film-making, Identity Politics, and the Melodramatic Fantasy

Meeting Two Queens (1991), recently identified as central to the emerging "New Queer Cinema,"[1] belongs in a tradition within the avant-garde known as the "found footage" film, a tradition including such films as *A Movie* and *A Report,* by Bruce Conner, and *Standard Gauge,* by Morgan Fisher. Film scholars have placed these works within the avant-garde because their construction through appropriation and juxtaposition of fragments from a variety of films supposedly offers a commentary on the meaning process of all films—a self-reflexive exposé of how meaning is read not only from each shot of a film, but also from the juxtaposition of shots within narrative units such as the scene and the sequence. While Spanish video-maker Cecilia Barriga's *Meeting Two Queens*, a video constructed of fragments from films starring Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, shares this meta-filmic strategy, it is different from these other texts in ways that are significant for readings produced by, for, and within a politics of identity/identities. I will argue that the significance of *Meeting Two Queens* vis-à-vis identity politics lies less in its self-conscious exposure of how cinematic meaning is read than in its interpellation of a spectator who identifies with the images as a fan and who responds to their strategies of affect.

Since *Meeting Two Queens* has been mainly seen on the festival circuit and cannot be described in conventional plot recitations of two or three sentences, an explicit recounting is helpful. *Meeting Two Queens* uses footage from Hollywood films starring Garbo and Dietrich, ordering its images of the stars into 13 sections, each accompanied by an originally produced music sound track. Each section is titled according to a theme, setting, prop, or narrative gesture shared by the shots it lifts from Garbo and Dietrich films. "The Lake," the video's opening sequence, crosscuts shots of Garbo and Dietrich enjoying idyllic interludes with male companions. The video here crosscuts on eyeline matches of each star looking, so they seem to be as interested in each other's approval as in that of their male lovers. "The Suitcase" is much less self-contained—instead of a mini-narrative preserving classical unity of place (like "The Lake"), it presents us with a series of images of Garbo and Dietrich as world-weary characters arriving and departing from the various exotic destinations that so often provided the settings of the stars' films. "The Hospital" depicts a search for an injured or ill loved-one in the named setting. "The Library" juxtaposes images of Garbo and Dietrich to suggest a playful seduction, while "The Job" constructs them as housewives.

With "The Persecution," the video shifts tone from sexy playfulness to a cliff-hanging suspense reminiscent of a Griffith last-minute rescue as it crosscuts between Garbo's frantic driving of a team of horses and Dietrich's attempts to elude a pursuer—who appears to us to be Garbo—by automobile. "The Telephone" and "The Hat" orient their images of the stars around the props that perhaps most characterize the mise-en-scène of the classical Hollywood romantic comedy or woman's film, the two genres with which Garbo and Dietrich are most associated. These sections use only close-ups of the two stars, as if they are suggesting the appeal of these genres through the production convention that most created and revealed star power in classical Hollywood. Garbo and Dietrich were never cast in the same film, but through crosscutting and the optical effects of "The Dialogue" they appear next to each other in the frame. The sound track's somber music and the stars' overwrought gesticulations and mouthing of dialogue construct this fantasy co-starring as unhappy love story. "The Gesture" extends this mood, using images from films in which Garbo and Dietrich seemingly fulfill unhappy destinies. A hand brought to the mouth, the blowing of cigarette smoke, a slow turning of the head are recognizable as the gestures of defiance or resignation that enact the melodramatic mode, and they seem to condense all our understandings not only of these two stars but also of the bittersweet pleasures of the unhappy ending in classical Hollywood films. In "The Meeting" and "The Alcove," the stars re-emerge triumphant. In the former, Garbo is seen as Queen Christina, Dietrich as Catherine the Great. As each parades in full regalia down rows of courtiers and soldiers, screen direction is manipulated through shot juxtaposition to suggest that the two will meet in their full glory. In "The Alcove," that meeting is suggested—through crosscutting images of each star disrobing—as an opportunity for lovemaking between the two "queens." Finally, in "The End," Garbo and Dietrich are caught in the fade-out kiss—the male lovers have returned for this, but again compete with women for the stars' attention. We last see the faces of Garbo and Dietrich in a series of superimpositions. In close-up (from *Blonde Venus*), Dietrich sheds a tear, which quickly dissolves into an image of Garbo's face. As Garbo's countenance fills the screen, a superimposition of Dietrich's face gradually overwhelms hers, until it seems to ripen into Garbo's once again—and for the last time—as the image fades to black.

Identity Politics and the Lesbian Fan

Contemporary theories of identity politics tend to explore the tension between postmodernist/poststructuralist ideas of subjectivity—which posit identity as split between fictional agency and unconscious desires but so fragmented in terms of class, gender, race, and sexual orientation as to level out significant "differences" between subjects—and the historical reality and lived experience of groups or subjects marginalized by these same terms of class, gender, race, and sexual orientation, in which each category is constructed as "other." The tension is thus one between an unfixed, plural identity and a (provisionally) fixed one, where the individual is disempowered by some mark of "otherness." Marginalized groups trying to theorize or practice an "identity politics" typically find themselves having to acknowledge differences within groups and differences among groups, while acting in some way to provide a provisional unity among marginalized groups to struggle against often common oppressors (e.g., straight feminist–gay feminist alliances against patriarchy).[2]

Meeting Two Queens fits into this context by making available readings that suggest a provisional straight feminist–gay feminist alliance or, more accurately, an overlap in terms of how straight and lesbian women might negotiate pleasure and self-identity in patriarchal culture and its ideological apparati, such as the classical cinema, even as it gestures toward the impossibility of fitting into just one of those—or perhaps any—identity. *Meeting Two Queens* accomplishes this in part because it is a fan text—a text made by a fan of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich for fans or potential fans of these two stars who are significant in film history, in feminist criticism, and especially in lesbian subculture.[3] While it could be said that all found-footage film texts participate in what Michel de Certeau calls "textual poaching" in that they take material from other texts and recontextualize it or put it to new use (through new juxtapositions), *Meeting Two Queens* manifests a poaching particular to fan activity.[4] It creates a sense that the material poached—specifically, images of Garbo and Dietrich—matters as what Larry Grossberg calls "investment portfolios" or "billboards" of investment, which secure or advertise the place within which fans locate self-identity.[5] In other words, the film prompts the spectator's self-recognition through its production of affect, the sense

that these stars and the scenarios they are enacting matter to the film-maker and to us.

One way *Meeting Two Queens* produces affect is by activating our investment in the extra-textual discourses about Garbo and Dietrich, so that we get even more pleasure from the text if we read star images and performances not solely from within how the stars play a character in a specific diegetic context. We get more pleasure from the video's fictionalized meetings between Garbo and Dietrich if we read them against gossip, not only the most prevalent form for the circulation of extra-cinematic knowledge about stars but an enunciative activity that, Patricia Meyer Spacks argues, "embodies an alternative discourse to that of public life, and a discourse potentially challenging to public assumptions; it provides language for an alternative culture."[6] In her article "'I Get a Queer Feeling When I Look at You': Hollywood Stars and Lesbian Spectatorship of the 1930s," Andrea Weiss uses this definition of gossip to describe the creation of a lesbian subculture. According to Weiss, gossip helped foster (especially pre-Stonewall) lesbian subculture because it offered a discourse alternative to that of public life at a time when public life offered no visibility to gay culture and experience. She argues that rumors about film stars' possible lesbian or bisexual affiliations were empowering to an emerging lesbian subculture from the 1930s to the 1950s because they helped members reread in lesbian terms what was ostensibly a straight narrative or straight scene.

As an example of this interpretive strategy, Weiss discusses a scene from *Morocco* (poached by Barriga) in which Dietrich co-starred with Gary Cooper, an actor often coded "feminine" in many films and publicity stills, and the object of some speculation and desire within the gay male subculture. In this scene from her first American film, Dietrich—dressed in top hat and tails—kisses a woman and takes her flower, but then gives it to Cooper. Some critics have suggested Dietrich's intent is heterosexually motivated, and that the scene's hint of lesbianism is to make her exotic or to titillate a "masculinized" spectator assumed to be heterosexual. But Weiss argues that "if we bring to the scene the privileged rumor of Dietrich's sexuality, we may read it differently: as Dietrich momentarily stepping out of her role as femme fatale and acting out that rumoured [bi- or homo-] sexuality on the screen."[7]

This rereading of classical Hollywood film images is potentially empowering in part because it allowed pre-Stonewall lesbian-identified spectators to have role models that were stars of a popular medium—a medium which captured the imagination of the whole moviegoing world, not just that of gay subculture. For as Weiss argues, "[U]nlike racial and ethnic minorities, [gays] grew up in households where their parents not only did not share their lifestyle but actively fought it with the help of the law, psychology, religion and sometimes violence. For a people who were striving toward self knowledge, Hollywood stars became important models in the formation of gay identity."[8]

But Barriga is not only relying on extra-textual knowledge of Dietrich and Garbo to enhance the possibility of a specifically lesbian pleasure or self-recognition in *Meeting Two Queens*. She also counts on the spectator operating and identifying within *intra*-textual knowledge of both the stars' Hollywood films and her own video. In her reappropriation of images of these stars, shots from different films are juxtaposed so that Garbo and Dietrich appear to gaze at each other. This not only reminds us that many of these stars' films depicted lesbian behavior—as the scene from *Morocco* or the image from *Queen Christina* of Garbo in male costume kissing her young lady-in-waiting might imply. It also suggests that through poaching, Barriga creates a lesbian text (instead of a subtext) and licenses an explicit lesbian identification, rather than relegating the mobilization of such a desire for being and having the other to a closeted activity, which was most likely the case for the identifying lesbian spectator going to the movies in the 1930s and 1940s. For example, in the parts titled "The Library" and "The Alcove," the video uses footage of Dietrich from *Song of Songs*, one of her more conventional films (and one in which she was cast by Paramount in part to counter audience impressions that she was too mysterious and unnaturally under the power of von Sternberg), to subvert a straight reading of Dietrich and the characters she portrays. In the original film, Dietrich plays a sheltered young woman who becomes a model for a sculptor who sees her as the ideal of feminine beauty. For "The Alcove," Barriga selects shots from this film in which Dietrich is dressed in conservative nineteenth-century garb, has her hair in a braided bun, and acts insecure and apprehensive. In *Song of Songs*, Dietrich's character is shy and submissive toward the male character, who fetishizes her beauty. In Barriga's film, Dietrich appears to act this way for Garbo—i.e., a femme lesbian acting out coy sex and the masquerade of womanliness for the butch lesbian played by Garbo, dressed here in men's clothing (from a scene in *Queen Christina* in which she is masquerading as a man).

Sue-Ellen Case has argued that the role-playing of the butch-femme lesbian couple confounds the phallic economy and received psychoanalytic wisdom that a woman can't claim possession of the phallus openly, but only through reaction formations in which she must masquerade femininity to hide the illicit possession of the penis. The butch and femme couple role-playing—in which the butch openly displays her possession of the penis and the femme compensates for her "lack" through exaggerated femininity—reorients the masquerade of gender as one between women. Case suggests that the butch-femme couple underscores that the two roles are "two optional functions in phallocracy" which can be assumed in a politically progressive way because they demonstrate that "penis-related posturings" are roles, "not biological birthrights, nor any essentialist poses."[9] While I would suggest that this argument provides one way of reading the scene between Dietrich and Garbo in "The Alcove," the section titled "The Library" suggests that the fantasies in the butch-femme role-playing are not confined to such a male-identified interpretation of butch, in which women must don the appearance and gestures of men to play with "masculine" and "feminine," "passive" and "submissive." And although the shots of Dietrich in this section are similar in content to the ones used in "The Alcove," Garbo here expresses her forthright desire to the shy Dietrich while dressed in the ultra-feminine costumes of the character Camille.

Queer theory has argued that feminist film theory has repeated patriarchy's binary notion of masculine/feminine in its designation of transvestism (a woman dressing in men's clothing) as the only activity for the female spectator as desiring subject. Lucretia Knapp suggests that a queer "voice" is audible in the interaction between spectator and classical Hollywood text, refuting the theoretical account of the female spectator only imagining "active agency with men's clothing":

> Desire [in Doane's analysis] is thought in heterosexual terms and thus contained by a dichotomous structure of male and female, masculine and feminine. However, pumps and loafers are not adequate assessments or reasonable representations of desire. . . . Such an account of spectatorship seems similar to Freud's analysis of the lesbian: if a woman desires a woman, she takes up the position of the man. The concept of transvestism is not as threatening to patriarchy as the image of the lesbian is, for transvestism still implies masculine privilege. However difficult she is to imagine, when a woman desires a woman, she is not a man.[10]

Barriga's selection of images of Garbo and Dietrich, attesting to the diversity and multiplicity of their role-playing, seems to both imagine that woman whom Knapp describes and confirm queer theory's rejection of either/or gender choices and sexual performances.

The Rhetoric and Fantasies of Melodrama

It is no surprise that *Meeting Two Queens* has been hailed as part of a New Queer Cinema and has already achieved cult status. Ranging in tone from parodic humor to heartfelt homage, the video seems at once to confirm the queerness of so many moments in classical Hollywood films and also to address a historically defined lesbian spectator who will knowingly nod at the poaching of images from *specific* Hollywood films—those starring Garbo *and* Dietrich, who, enthroned as queens in gay folklore, mark the growth of gay subculture in the twentieth century.

Yet I don't think the controlling agenda of *Meeting Two Queens* is to "out" Garbo and Dietrich. This could have been accomplished with another kind of poaching. Barriga could have used images and text from media sources more conclusive about the stars' sexual orientations than their star film vehicles. *Confidential Magazine* had outed Dietrich in the 1950s; Mercedes de Acosta, female lover of both stars, published an autobiography in the 1960s that, although not explicit in sexual details, makes clear the nature of her own relationships with Garbo and Dietrich. Even promotion and publicity disseminated by the studios and the complicitous fan magazine industry play (however unconsciously) with the notion that these stars elicit an erotic cathexis with the female as well as male audience.[11]

While that kind of poaching would yield its own pleasures, insights, and potential empowerments, I think it is significant that Barriga did not choose a more empirically historical content and style for this celebration of Garbo and Dietrich. Such a documentary approach would have made it easier for straight audiences to distance themselves from the queerness of these stars and their film vehicles. What I want to suggest is that the video is pleasurable to an audience of diverse sexual and fan orientations in its use of the rhetoric and fantasy scenarios recognizable from melodrama which do not limit the production of pleasure to a straight/gay polarization. Melodrama, of course, is the genre and mode that film and literary scholars have distinguished from others by its excessive generation of affect. The video deploys this rhetoric through the musical score, which follows most film melodrama's scores in its miming and signaling of excess or moments of great significance; through the use of mostly close-up shots of Garbo and Dietrich in which they express intense emotion (joy, desperation, melancholy, sexual desire, etc.); and through an ordering of narrative sequences that build to a climax of sexual seduction and end in scenes of a fall or triumph. I will focus on the latter two strategies in relation to how they facilitate the fantasy scenarios of melodrama which have special appeal to women and gays (male and female), those spectators who, Peter Matthews suggests, have the most difficulty in bringing their "subjective desire into conformity with the rule of the [patriarchy's] reality principle."[12]

A number of critics have accounted for Hollywood film as "pleasure machine" in terms of its production of fantasy scenarios or narratives.[13] Linda Williams, for instance, explores the excessive pleasures of such Hollywood genres as the horror film and the maternal melodrama (as well as the non-Hollywood genre of pornography) by using the definition of fantasy provided by psychoanalysts Laplanche and Pontalis:

> For fantasies are not . . . wish-fulfilling linear narratives of mastery and control leading to closure and the attainment of desire. They are marked, rather, by the prolongation of desire, and by the lack of fixed position with respect to the objects and events fantasized. . . . Fantasy is not so much a narrative that enacts the quest for an object of desire as it is a setting for desire, a place where conscious and unconscious, self and other, part and whole meet.[14]

Meeting Two Queens is structured like a fantasy as Williams and Laplanche and Pontalis describe it—it consists of a number of sequences in which shots/scenes are edited to suggest a certain theme, which, in turn, suggests a prop or setting or activities to facilitate the staging of desire: the lake, the alcove, the hospital, the hat, the telephone, the suitcase, the job, the meeting. All of the sequences, except perhaps "The Alcove" and "The End," have beginnings or endings that are arbitrary in that they are not dictated by classical

goals or closure. They seem to exist—as do Garbo and Dietrich—in and for themselves.

The close-ups of Garbo and Dietrich serve as crucial props or settings in the staging of desire in *Meeting Two Queens*. They are cues for accessing one kind of fantasy scenario that melodrama evokes—the fantasy of origins and their loss. This fantasy, most frequently appropriated by the maternal melodrama in its stories of mothers' sacrifices of and for their children, is a replaying of the imagined union and loss of the mother's body—the site of all humans' origins and later, in the mirror phase of identity, the facilitator of the split within subjectivity (the split between self and other, the signifier and the signified) *and* its fantasy of wholeness. Some critics have suggested that the photographic or cinematic images of the female face recall this multiple and ambivalent notion of the mother:

> At moments it almost seems as though all the fetishism of the cinema were condensed onto the image of the face, the female in particular. . . . The face is that bodily part not accessible to the subject's own gaze (or accessible only as a virtual image in a mirror)—hence its overrepresentation as *the* instance of subjectivity.[15]

Diana Fuss suggests that the spectatorial pleasure taken from the close-up of the female face might have a special intensity for the female viewer, who no matter what her sexual orientation is, (re-)experiences a homosexually inflected relation with the mother:

> The female subject, whose hold on subjectivity is always a precarious one [because of identification with the mother], may derive a special pleasure from this "face-to-face" encounter with a shimmering, luminous, reconstituted image of the mythic "Mother"; the photograph's structure of visualization stages a homosexual-maternal encounter by symbolically imagining for the spectator a fantasized pre-oedipal relation with the face of the maternal.[16]

Film theorists have analyzed the films and performances of Garbo and Dietrich in similar terms. Gaylyn Studlar has argued that Dietrich's characters, performance, and appearance (costuming, make-up, quality of photographing her close-ups) in her films directed by von Sternberg suggest an enactment of the pre-Oedipal child's fantasy of the powerful phallic mother.[17] Peter Matthews has posited that Garbo's mysterious "Mona Lisa" smile reveals her phallic maternity, the woman without lack. That gazing face of Garbo is "the hieroglyph that memorializes a prehistoric perversity anterior to the formation of the codified 'symbolic' gender positions of masculine-active and feminine-passive."[18] Matthews argues that its fetishization in Garbo's woman's films invites the female spectator to enjoy a "'utopian' space of feminine rapport"[19] and the gay male spectator to " 'take his own person as a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love.' "[20]

Meeting Two Queens accentuates the relation between the close-up of the female face and the lost, phallic maternal. The video offers its images of the stars by fragmenting narratives—poaching individual shots from a variety of films. The close-ups, then, are torn from their original narrative context, affording the spectator the opportunity to focus sole attention on the stars' faces, which the gorgeous, softly lit, and soft-focus photography of some of Hollywood's greatest cinematographers has rendered as icons of ideal feminine beauty. On the one hand, the video potentially facilitates the spectator's meditation on the meanings of such filmic conventions, a consideration for any argument on its place within the avant-garde. On the other, it potentially facilitates the spectator's entrance into the Imaginary through the illusion of direct rapport with the star, something Laura Mulvey claimed Dietrich was able to effect even in the context of a classical narrative.[21]

Perhaps the most significant use of facial close-ups in *Meeting Two Queens* is in the last sequence, "The End." It is this sequence, which ends by alternating superimpositions of the two stars' faces, that most suggests the video's play with melodramatic narrative blockages and resolutions and its envisioning of a utopian relation between women.

To understand this final part of the video, it is important to examine its relation to the other sequences. It shares with many of them images of the two stars which encode them as fallen women. We know they are fallen women even if we do not know that these two actresses often starred in the "fallen woman" subgenre of melodrama, for they evidence a recognizable semiotics of what in patriarchy equals a sexually knowing (and therefore fallen) woman. Overly made-up, in the excessively frilled, cheap garments traditionally associated with prostitutes (as the images from Garbo's *Anna Christie* and Dietrich's *Blonde Venus* exemplify) or in the stylish costumes of the demi-monde or café society (as the images from

Garbo's *Camille* or *Susan Lennox: Her Rise and Fall* and Dietrich's *Morocco* represent), Garbo and Dietrich are coded as transgressive women. In the Hollywood film narratives which trace the trajectory of such women, their first, moral "fall" necessitates a second fall that demands (sometimes) economic punishment and submission to patriarchal authority. Although *Meeting Two Queens* plays on our recognitions of Garbo and Dietrich as stars of this kind of melodrama and therefore playing characters subjected to a punitive patriarchy, its reappropriation of images and narrative contexts from the original films tends to leave out all those moments when the characters played by Garbo and Dietrich were subjected to or punished by men. Here they are subjected to a mutual gazing by and for women, as—with a couple of exceptions—men are elided out of the images altogether. This is true even when the video does use a punishment scene. "The Gesture" poaches shots of Garbo going to the firing squad in *Mata Hari*, but since here we only see the punishment and not the crime, Garbo's dramatic walk to her execution (dressed in simple black, denied all her sexually alluring clothes) comes off as a supreme example of a star turn. This contributes to the video's overall strategy—presenting us with a series of images of women. Garbo and Dietrich are shown playing different women, which makes us aware of them as images or as playing roles of femininity—so that Garbo and Dietrich, and maybe we too, are all of these women or perhaps none at all. Identity is problematized even as Garbo and Dietrich—the great stars with so much style and feeling—are being celebrated by a fan film-maker and fan spectators.

"The End" in a sense condenses into one sequence the strategies of multiplying identities and of turning any punishment or unhappy ending into triumph for the female stars. Here, the series of images of Garbo and Dietrich evokes fallen women, butch lesbians, heterosexual lovers, and pensive—perhaps even tragic—women. But instead of an unabashed celebration of multiple identities, the sequence is melancholy. The music is somber, the final images figure the stars' faces as transformations of a tear. Is this a registering of the loss of these two stars (although Dietrich was not yet dead when the video was made)? Or of sadness that they couldn't come "out" in their lifetimes?

I would suggest that this is a perversely happy ending to the video, one that is complicit with the fantasy scenarios evoked by melodramatic structures of blockage and resolution. The pleasure of the fantasy scenario is in the expression of the wish, the setting out of desire, not necessarily in its fulfillment. This is why melodramas are so pleasurable—they set up so many roadblocks to the fulfillment of desire in the form of missed meetings, misunderstandings, illnesses, etc. In melodramas with unhappy or unresolved endings, the fantasy can be prolonged. *Meeting Two Queens* suggests such a prolongation in several of its sequences—in a kind of playful, teasing way in "The Meeting," in which Garbo and Dietrich are the queens who will never meet in the same frame, and in "The Alcove," in which they are disrobing lovers whom we will never see embracing. These sequences are satisfying because they operate by teasing us with what we know can't happen (and for that reason, they are more successful than "The Dialogue," where the two share the frame through optical effects).

The final images of "The End" are complex in this regard. A tear produces the last glimpses we have of Garbo and Dietrich. In the terms of melodramatic resolutions described above, this unhappy ending could suggest the continuance of *our* desire to see them together. On the other hand, the way the faces are superimposed or layered onto one another could convey their union and perhaps a transcendence of fate. And it does seem significant that one woman gives

birth to another, comparable to Barriga's (re-)creation of their images here through textual poaching. I argue that this is as much constitutive of the video's utopian vision of the relation between women as it is a prolongation of our desire for the two stars, and that it suggests the opening of a feminist space for reading. *Meeting Two Queens* causes us to reflect not only on how meaning and identities are constructed, but also on why we get so much pleasure and pain out of that ultimately elusive process.

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Notes

Meeting Two Queens is available from Women Make Movies.

1. B. Ruby Rich, "New Queer Cinema," *Sight and Sound*, vol. 2, no. 5 (September 1992).
2. See Diana Fuss, "Inside/Out," in ed. Fuss, *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1993) for excellent explorations of these tensions within identity politics.
3. For theoretical discussions of the pleasure of Garbo's image, see Roland Barthes, "The Face of Garbo," and Kenneth Tynan, "Garbo," both reprinted in ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), and Peter Matthews, "Garbo and Phallic Motherhood: A 'Homosexual' Visual Economy," *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 3 (Summer 1988). Dietrich's image has been discussed in two of the "founding" arguments of feminist film theory—Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975) and Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," reprinted in ed. Bill Nichols, *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976)—as exemplary of the kind of visual pleasure available to the male spectator of the classical Hollywood film. Dietrich has also been used as an example by theorists countering Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure and spectatorship. See Gail Seneca and Lucie Arbuthnot, "Pre-text and Text in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*," reprinted in ed. Patricia Erens, *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); Gaylyn Studlar, *In The Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988) and "Masochism, Masquerade, and the Erotic Metamorphoses of Marlene Dietrich," in ed. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Patricia White, "Hitchcock, Hommo-sexuality, and the Power of Interpretation," unpublished paper given at Society for Cinema Studies Conference, 1992.
4. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984). See also Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
5. Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," in ed. Lisa Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 57.
6. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 46.
7. Andrea Weiss, "'I Get a Queer Feeling When I Look at You': Hollywood Stars and Lesbian Spectatorship of the 1930s," in ed. Christine Gledhill, *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 287.
8. Ibid., p. 288.
9. Sue-Ellen Case, "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," *Discourse*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 1988-89), pp. 55-73.
10. Lucretia Knapp, "The Queer Voice in *Marnie*," *Cinema Journal*, vol. 32, no. 4 (Summer 1993), p. 15.
11. See *Confidential Magazine*, July 1955; Mercedes de Acosta, *Here Lies the Heart* (New York: Reynal & Co., 1960). For a discussion or examples of publicity and promotion, see Katherine Albert, "She Threatens Garbo's Throne," *Photoplay*, December 1930, and Ruth Rankin, "They're All Queening It," *Photoplay*, December 1933; Peter Matthews, in "Garbo and Phallic Motherhood: A 'Homosexual' Visual Economy," discusses a caption for a photo of Garbo in terms of how it suggests the star's potential to "smite" women with equal force as she does men; Andrea Weiss, in "'I Get a Queer Feeling,'" discusses a poster for *Morocco* that declares Dietrich is "the woman all women want to see," p. 286.
12. Matthews, p. 18.
13. See Elizabeth Cowie, "Fantasia," in ed. Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie, *The Woman in Question* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); Steve Neale, "Melodrama and Tears," *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 6 (November-December 1986); Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly*, vol 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991). These theorists all agree on the fundamentally utopian nature of fantasy. For a somewhat different view, see Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 70–95.
14. Williams, p. 10.
15. Mary Ann Doane, "Veiling over Desire: Close-ups of the Woman," in ed. Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 108.
16. Diana Fuss, "Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer 1992), p. 722.
17. Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure.*
18. Matthews, p. 25.
19. Ibid., p. 38.
20. Ibid., p. 24.
21. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

Review

Peking Opera Blues

Director: Tsui Hark. Executive producer: Claudie Chung Chun. Screenplay: To Kwok-Wai. Cinematographer: Poon Hang-Seng. Editor: David Wu. Music: James Wong. RIM Film Distributors.

Tsui Hark is one of the most famous and prolific of Hong Kong's post-1979 generation of New Wave film-makers. On the basis of the very successful domestic release of titles he has directed for his own Film Workshop production company in Kowloon—including *All the Wrong Clues for the Right Solution* (1981), *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983), *Aces Go Places III* (1984), *Shanghai Blues* (1984), and *Once upon a Time in China* (1991)—as well as production credits for well-known movies by John Woo and Ching Siu Tung,[1] Tsui's work has made the transition to the large Chinese communities of the United States and also to a small section of the white North American and European markets. His films often crop up in retrospectives of modern Cantonese cinema, are regularly shown at international film festivals, and are written about by Western journalists and scholars. Of all his films, it is perhaps the 1986 action-comedy *Peking Opera Blues* that is most often singled out for attention.

Peking Opera Blues is set in China in 1913, two years after the Republican revolution that toppled the Last Emperor, and a time when the country was being fought over by competing warlords. The film opens with General Tsao taking charge of the city palace after the ignoble departure of General Tun. The general's daughter, Tsao Wan (played by Brigitte Lin), has returned from studying overseas to be with her father. Because of her pro-democracy sympathies, she immediately embarks upon a plan to steal, with the help of the young guerrilla Ling Pak Hoi (Mark Cheng), some incriminating documents hidden in the general's safe. The plan fails, but in the process the two revolutionaries meet up with Sheung Hung (Cherie Chung), a gold-digging musician, Pat Neil (Sally Yeh), daughter of the owner of the Peking Opera House, and a young Chinese soldier, Tung Man (Cheung Kwok Keung). The five form an unlikely alliance. Another plan to steal the documents during a Peking Opera performance is foiled by Commander Liu and his men from the "Ticketing Office" (a bunch of extremely violent tax collectors). After this, the plot revolves around a series of disguises, separations, betrayals, rescues, violent confrontations, and narrow escapes. The five friends finally achieve their revolutionary goal, but nothing much happens as a result. An end title tells us that the generals are at it once more; war has broken out, the country has split in two; thus,

Tsui Hark on the set of *A Chinese Ghost Story I*

Craig D. Reid

Interview with Tsui Hark

Vietnamese born, Hong Kong raised, and American trained, 44-year-old Tsui Hark is the acknowledged leader of the New Wave, foreign-trained Hong Kong film-makers. Director, producer, writer, editor, FX supervisor, and part-time actor, Tsui has filmed everything from fantasy, science fiction, and

Rim Film Distributors, Inc.

Pat Neil (Sally Yeh) performs in *Peking Opera Blues*

"the Chinese Democratic Revolution began all over again."

Despite the fact that *Peking Opera Blues* was not picked up by a major American distributor after its initial New York release in 1987, many of the critics who saw the film predicted that—despite its atrociously inadequate and confused subtitles—its accelerated narrative pace, brilliantly choreographed fight scenes, and irresistible star performances could make it a box-office success in the West.

As *Peking Opera Blues* is a cornerstone of the Hong Kong New Wave cinema, and as Hong Kong is likely to elicit more international attention over the next few years because of the extraordinary nature of its current political situation, the film may yet provide a key reference point for Western audiences trying to understand what cinema and life in Hong Kong are all about. Most obviously, the film can take its place among those titles that invite interpretation as allegories about 1997, the year when Hong Kong will revert back to Chinese sovereignty after 99 years of British colonial rule. The arbitrary, short-sighted nature of the original 1898 hand-over treaty between the two countries (with Britain fearing at the time that a more permanent settlement might encourage its international rivals to seek similar economic footholds in the South

horror to comedy, crime, and romance. He consistently produces quality products at breakneck speed, at a fraction of the money spent by most top Hollywood action film-makers.

After graduating in film from the University of Texas, Tsui made a documentary about Chinese garment workers in New York in 1976. Returning to Hong Kong, he made a TV miniseries, "The Gold Dagger Romance" (1978), which was hailed by critics as one of the most important works in the history of Hong Kong television. Tsui first broke onto the international cinematic scene in 1986 with his critically acclaimed, turn-of-the-century, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*-type classic, *Peking Opera Blues*. He has also been credited with developing some of the most violent action epics in the history of cinema—Tsui's long-time collaboration with his friend and colleague John Woo resulted in first a violent cops-and-robbers thriller called *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), and then the cult classic, *The Killer* (1989), a film that dealt with honor and male bonding and brought explosive carnage to new heights. However, it was his fifth film, *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983), a horror-supernatural dazzler, that galvanized audiences and revolutionized a waning Hong Kong film industry.

In more recent years, Tsui has further strengthened his place at the top with his lurid ghost thriller trilogy "A Chinese Ghost Story" (1987–1991), the now classic "Swordsman" trilogy (1990–93), the historical drama epics "Once Upon a Time in China" (1991–95), and his blockbuster sci-fi thriller, *Wicked City* (1993). Tsui shares with his audience an unabashed pleasure in straightforward storytelling. His plots are anchored in his characters, weaving in the guiltless pleasure of stunts, slapstick, wild chases (no cars), and soaring virtuoso displays of gunfire, sword-

China Seas region) is clearly alluded to in the film. Early on, a Chinese warlord meets with representatives from the five foreign banks he is clandestinely doing business with. They tell him how much the dividend on his investment will be after so many years, whereupon the general happily puts his name to the document that will then become the object of a frantic, pro-democracy search. "What will the world look like 47 years later?," he laughs. "Who knows? Give me a pen."

The political implications of such autonomy from, and imminent return to, the mainland provide the point of departure for *Peking Opera Blues*'s narrative. The use of a theatrical setting—most of the action is set in the distinctive Chun Wo Ban, the Peking Opera House of the film's title—is a means to establish one distinct, bordered space within a larger, encroaching space. Furthermore, theatrical disguises, role-playing, and mistaken identities are all used to highlight some very real questions about cultural affiliation. This is a film that explores the ambivalence of Hong Kong's national identity.

In its concern with the attempt of a group of young guerrilla fighters to overthrow the generals and establish democratic rule, the film constructs two kinds of Chinese. The mainland Chinese are the villains; they comprise the national army, the Ticketing Officers and the warlords. The overseas Chinese are the heroes; they include the five revolutionaries, and the denizens of the Opera House. This Good Chinese/Bad Chinese dichotomy is posited as a political confrontation. The generals in Peking cannot comprehend the coexistence of social power, while the guerrilla fighters are concerned with overthrowing monarchism and restoring democracy.

As Tsui Hark himself has put it: "I don't know how the messages come across outside the country, but the film clearly takes a poke at the audience, saying that Chinese people do not know what democracy is. The first democratic revolution collapsed because of a power struggle . . . the film also takes a sly poke at the current Government."[2] According to *Peking Opera Blues*, democracy can only be achieved through violent means as all other avenues of approach have already been foreclosed. In common with many recent films from Hong Kong (such as *A Better Tomorrow*, *The Killer*, *The Wicked City*, and *The Heroic Trio*), this one also indulges in the fantasy of a small group of Good Chinese overcoming all odds to "magically" kill off the Bad Chinese.

Tsui's film style expresses this at every turn. His work has a restless, knife-edge quality that insists on moving a narrative along at breakneck speed—in other words, there is no time left to play with, the present is forever slipping through your fingers, whatever has to be said must be said very quickly. J. Hoberman once described the director as a "comic Eisenstein. . . . [I]t's not just his machine gun editing, but his use of typage, his analysis of circus attractions, his fascination with signs, and his interest in political upheaval that link him to the Soviet master."[3] It might be suggested, in support of such a contention, that in

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play, and emotion. The "Swordsman" films pay homage to the classic Chinese swordplay epics with their imaginative special effects and meticulously choreographed fight scenes and acrobatics. But the trilogy also touches on the subject of 1997, when Britain hands over Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China. And the poor economic situation of futuristic Hong Kong in *Wicked City* is explicitly blamed on the 1997 take-over.

During a recent visit to Hong Kong, I was Tsui's guest at the world premiere of his latest period piece, *Green Snake*, and was able to talk with him about his views on film-making.

REID: *How did you end up in Texas?*

TSUI: There are two ways to get involved in the Chinese film industry. Either you work hard as a continuity person, stunt man, or some sort of assistant in a studio here in Hong Kong or you go overseas to film school. I always wanted to study film. I was so bored after Hong Kong high school that I decided to go to America and study film. My father sent me to the University of Texas, the only school that accepted me. He thought that I was studying medicine; when he discovered I was studying film, he threatened to hang himself.

You first started in Hong Kong, with television miniseries?

When I returned to Hong Kong, the industry was changing and money was available to replace the old generation of film-makers. It was easier to break into television and make those "lian xu zhu" [Kung-fu soap operas] TV miniseries. It was easier to work with video from a filming, editing, and especially from a special-effects point of view. And I learned that I could change structure and tradition.

It wasn't just storytelling but creating an emotion or an impression, and that impression must be rooted in the subconscious. In fact, my most prominent les-

Peking Opera Blues montage is used for the purposes of (Marxist?) political analysis. Although Hoberman doesn't provide textual evidence for his argument, a brief analysis of a short moment from a single scene is enough to bear it out.

As almost every critic who has written about the film has observed, *Peking Opera Blues* is built around three charismatic women who want different things from Chinese society (social change; access to culture and/or men; money in order to be able to escape to another country). When Pat Neil first meets the other two major female characters as they inadvertently enter the grounds of her father's house while trying to hide from the men from the Ticketing Office, their initial interaction establishes, with great economy, just what it is that the women are after. (The shots also confirm the film's interest in establishing female agency as a main narrative drive; the two male characters with them are denied the kind of point-of-view shots granted to their female counterparts.)

The six shot units I want to concentrate on are examples of both Hollywood-style shot/reverse shot configurations, and Soviet-style dialectical montage. An image of each female character looking offscreen is followed, in quick succession, by a shot of what she is looking at. Pat Neil looks first; she sees a handsome guerrilla fighter. Sheung Hung looks next and sees the box that contains the valuable pearls she has been trying to retrieve. The last look is reserved for Tsao Wan; she looks over her shoulder and what she sees is the blood dripping from the wound in the arm of the Chinese soldier she had earlier helped to save. Sexmoneyrevolution. These two final shots are the most telling. The suggestion of violent social conflict is set up dialectically, with a thesis (Tsao Wan's look) and its antithesis (the blood of the soldier) producing a synthesis related to political struggle. Here, as in the numerous famous examples from Eisenstein's *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin*, it is up to the viewer to make the revolutionary connection.

It is also possible to find, in the director's style, a parallel to Eisenstein's desire to achieve synthesis within each individual shot. A recurrent trait of *Peking Opera Blues* is its use of rack focus within single frames to reveal two simultaneous levels of action—more often than not, these levels consist of a Chinese authority figure overseeing a guerrilla fighter, thus linking the Good/Bad Chinese characters in a perpetual power conflict.

At first glance (given the Western tendency to follow narratives through a single protagonist), it might seem as if it is one person, Tsao Wan, who is the character most likely to see the "heroic" project through. Certainly she is an extraordinary woman: she studied gynecology overseas; sports short hair and dons mannish suits; she rescues her male and female comrades and is rescued by them; she can come across as a loving, vulnerable daughter or an ambitious, zealous revolutionary; she cherishes genuine female friendship but also connives to get what she wants even from the people closest to her. Above all, and this occurs in a scene that has no equivalent in any Western

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Jet Li in *Swordsman II*

son in film-making occurred while studying television direction in the States. I was a cameraman filming a dance routine inside a studio. My professor told me not just to look in front of the camera but also behind the camera for something interesting. When I turned around, I saw shadows of the dancers. He taught me to always look for things that most people weren't looking for or at.

Why didn't you follow the standard supernatural horror genre mold?

When I ventured into the genre, everyone believed that horror films had to have hopping vampires, green-skinned ghosts, or monsters. But there are many ways to create a horror film. You can create a monster or use daily-life psychological things. I didn't want to imitate the American productions so I decided to make a horror film that a Chinese

film I can think of, she is capable of withstanding ruthless torture by the authorities.

Tsao Wan's position is established by the first scene in which she appears. She is initially introduced in relation to her father. At the beginning of the film, he is the most powerful warlord in China—more than that, since he is fighting with other warlords for absolute rule of the country, there is a sense in which Tsao Wan's father is "China." This early scene also introduces most of the narrative themes, and I read it as being constructed so as to have a great symbolic importance for the domestic Hong Kong audience. After a suspected guerrilla attack on his trigger-happy army has been thwarted, the general turns in the carriage he is sharing with his daughter in order to reassure her of their safety. He takes her hand: "Wan, are you scared?" "I'm alright, Papa." "You've been away and living in comfort for years. Now you have to get used to the way of living of your native land." "I'll certainly make it."

That last line, which I've quoted directly from the film's English subtitles, constitutes Tsao Wan's crucial response to her return to the mainland, her subordination once again to the authority of Chinese leaders. It is not hard to see how her words are related very precisely to the social problem that provides the main contextual discourse surrounding the production of *Peking Opera Blues*.

In 1984, after two years of formal negotiations, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher flew to Beijing for the official signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Future of Hong Kong, the treaty that would lay out the terms for the handover 13 years later. The details of this arrangement provoked mixed reactions. While the optimists in Hong Kong looked forward to reunification with the "Motherland," the pessimists felt that Britain had not established sufficient grounds for the maintenance of democratic rights once China reannexed their country. They felt that the old European masters wanted to take what they could before the new masters arrived, and had therefore betrayed Hong Kong by not looking out for its interests. Tsui Hark must be counted as one of these pessimists—as he is often taken to be the great cynic of modern Hong Kong cinema.

"Hong Kong people find themselves in a helpless situation" he once explained. "They keep on thinking it's going to get better and better, and suddenly it's a nightmare. They have no petition in deciding their future, they have no voice, no rights. Nothing."[4] In *Shanghai Blues*, where a once bustling, cosmopolitan trading city is sucked dry by a Japanese takeover, Tsui used the historical tragedy of Shanghai as an analogy to the potential disaster represented by 1997, while for the third installment of the "Better Tomorrow" series (*Love and Death in Saigon*, 1989), he implied the same thing through a story about the problems of getting in and out of war-torn Vietnam.

With hindsight, it might be suggested that Tsui Hark's cynicism was proven to be justified in that it foreshadowed the events that occurred in China on June 4, 1989. The massacre of student protesters by

Joey Wang in *A Chinese Ghost Story III*

audience could relate to. Since it was based on a traditional tale, we called it *A Chinese Ghost Story*. The problem was how to make a horror film *and* make it romantic. Because this horror film didn't use a lot of ugly monstrous creatures and gory blood and guts, it was essential to focus in on other elements. Sure there was a giant-tongued monster and there were ghosts, but it was necessary to emphasize the psychological things, things that people face every day in their lives, then to exaggerate them to the point where they were scary.

In many of your films the theme of love takes a unique twist: you seem predisposed toward unearthly creatures falling in love with mortal man.

Chinese Government troops in and around Beijing's Tiananmen Square shocked the people of Hong Kong and threw the two countries into a diplomatic crisis. Amid unprecedented scenes of public mourning and grief (the center of Hong Kong was occupied on June 5 by nearly one million people), pessimism was proved prescient. Now, the settlement began to perceive 1997 as a threat that had suddenly become all too real. At the same time, the language coming out of China changed. Up until this point, diplomatic relations between Beijing and London had been concerned with projecting the joint aspiration for Hong Kong of "one country, two systems," but that was now transformed into the language of subversion. China proclaimed that it would not allow itself to be undermined by Hong Kong "guerrillas," and reiterated that Hong Kong was Chinese, and would be expected to follow the rule of Chinese law.[5]

In June, 1989, then, people from Hong Kong were viewed by the mainland Chinese leaders in the same way that they are viewed by the generals and warlords of *Peking Opera Blues*, namely as guerrilla fighters, terrorists, and ordinary people seeking to undermine official Chinese authority. The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Movement in China, formed in the optimism of May, became a troublesome organization that had to be eliminated. *Peking Opera Blues* can be seen to be politically prescient in that it is using this language of subversion three years before Tiananmen Square.

In the West, too, it might now be easier to perceive how the film's seductive, fantasylike qualities are put into the service of a very real political despair. Consider the movement of the narrative in relation to the British Government's reaction to Tiananmen Square. On June 6, the then Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, stood up in the Houses of Parliament in London to make the speech that would constitute the official British response to the massacre and would explain the implications of the Chinese Army's actions to the inhabitants of the British Empire's last major colony. He said that although Her Majesty's Government was most concerned about what China had just done, the 3.25 million British Dependent Territory citizens in Hong Kong would not be given the right of abode in the United Kingdom because "they will appreciate the reasons why we could not easily contemplate a massive new immigration commitment which would more than double the ethnic minority population of the United Kingdom—a possibility that cannot be disregarded." Such a treacherous about-turn in immigration policy adds bitter irony to the explanation of how it is possible to read *Peking Opera Blues* as a film in which the much-noted energy of popular Hong Kong cinema is channeled into a clear social dynamic—here, the characters are not just breathlessly running around, they are *running away.*

The movie opens on this note. One warlord has lost money to another in a few games of mah jongg. As he cannot now afford to pay his army, the soldiers are about to riot. In a scene of panic and impending (comic) violence, he decides to flee, taking all his

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I believe that romance is the key to the success of all action films. Love is very difficult to express in Chinese culture, so in my films I like to have a romantic touch where the nonhuman looks for love. The simple, single-minded people avoiding love survive. It's the intellectuals who have the most complicated attitudes that won't survive.

Emotion is the most essential element in my films, even the "Swordsman" films, which are about hatred, conflict, and brotherhood. But mostly they're full of hope. However, I feel that to do a film just to appease or generate feelings of pity... well, it's a flimsy reason to make a film. But one always needs hope, and the films are about bringing friends together with the help of song. The trilogy is a parody on the Cultural Revolution, reflecting the hatreds of splitting up but eventually getting back together.

Are you pleased with your new film, Green Snake?

In this film we used some new computerized special effects, but we had too many time constraints. In Hong Kong, long before a film is finished, it is already scheduled to play in the theaters. If it is not ready, it will not be seen. All the work will be for nothing.

The technical parts of *Green Snake* were disturbing; the results didn't come out the way we wanted. But I believe these old-style films are popular because they are so unrealistic. People live in small places within themselves, and they need a place to escape, and lots of stuff in these films offers them the opportunity to escape. These period piece films are based on old Chinese novels and I believe there is a resurgence in interest in these kinds of stories.

With 1997 drawing so close, it seems there is a mass exodus of Hong Kong talent leaving the country. What are your thoughts on that?

Many people have left, are planning to leave.

(From left) Sally Yeh, Cherie Chung, and Brigitte Lin

Rim Film Distributors, Inc.

remaining wealth with him. This first warlord later returns to Peking after the second has himself been forced to depart. After this, the theme of running away is habitually returned to. For example, after refusing to become a "husband" to the Head of the Ticketing Office, Fa, the Opera House star singer, exits through one of its windows, heading for another province.

One scene is of particular importance in relation to the theme of running away: the three heroines, all from different social classes and so representative of a certain political unity, are relaxing and drinking together in Tsao Wan's home—in other words, in the domain of her father, the most powerful warlord in Peking, the epitome of China itself. They gather around a globe and Sheung Hung frantically searches its surface with a magnifying glass. As the conversation continues, the scene switches from light-hearted comedy to melancholic sadness.

They are doing anything they can to get green cards and visas. Too many people expect something for nothing; that is why people fear the Communist takeover. But I'll just wait and see. In fact, when I returned to Hong Kong, I found it tough to adapt. In the early 1980s, material for film was more personal, about daily life. Suddenly now we're talking about the nation, and Hong Kong audiences have become concerned over what will happen in 1997. Now, they're making short-term plans, and they're looking for something: Where are they going to go? So now a character in a film is more politically conscious, reflecting that anxiety.

One essential difference I see in your films compared to many other Hong Kong films is that you don't waste time; each scene really moves the film forward.

This is one of the key concepts that members invited into my Film Workshop Company must abide by. My criteria for members are: You must develop your own style; there must be content, everything must have a point to it, even the Kung-fu fights; and films must appeal to the masses. A commercial film must be entertaining and make a person feel good. Otherwise, sooner or later, the audience will confront you. They'll say, "I don't believe it." Sometimes, even after 20 minutes of a film, I don't know what it's about. That's bad; the director can explain the logic to you all he wants and it doesn't matter. The masses go to feel, not to understand.

What's next for you?

I'd like to do some pure comedy. But I still want to continue doing period pieces, and of course I still have

Sheung Hung: The world is so big. Where can I go?

Tsao Wan: Are you planning to go somewhere?

Sheung Hung: Everyone is running away. Running for life.

Pat Neil: But this is a nice place. Why do we have to run away?

Tsao Wan: We're running around, and finally we go back the same route.

This obvious reference to 1997 exhibits an unmistakable concern with the idea of migrating in order to find a better future. But it is not clear exactly what kind of future it will be.

Audiences who are not too concerned about the 1997 factor as it manifests itself in recent Hong Kong movies have seen the film as explicitly political, but they tend to focus on different issues. Most have remarked on the highly suggestive gender politics of *Peking Opera Blues*, and in particular on its confusion of sex roles brought about by the use of a theatrical setting and the presence of three strong female leads. Specifically, these female protagonists initiate much of the action with their flamboyant energy. It is also worth pointing out in this regard not just the democratic spread of the group of five guerrilla fighters as a *whole*, all exhibiting equal bravery, equal beauty, equal comic skills, and taking up relatively equal amounts of screen time, but also the way in which the film organizes and presents their interrelationship. I am thinking here of how, when the film starts, we are presented with a dashing, fantastically athletic young male hero, Ling Pak Hoi. After a while, however, he tends to slip into the background as the ingenuity and bravery of each individual woman is stressed. When the young hero finally does save Tsao Wan, right at the end of the film, by pulling her to safety on the rooftops, it is not that much of a heroic gesture—he just happens to be in the right place at the right time.

When *Peking Opera Blues* was shown at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in October, 1989, it was presented as a film about cross-dressing. According to the Festival's publicity brochure, "It's against the context of how women usually behave in films that the adventurous heroine of *Peking Opera Blues* [i.e., Tsao Wan] becomes so appealing (well, OK, she also looks pretty cute in a suit) [sic]. Her role defies categorizing, upending all the usual expectations with no explanation. *Peking Opera Blues* also compounds its status by refusing to patronize its other female characters."

In recognizing that Tsui Hark's movie is not an "explicitly lesbian film," the festival organizers were picking up on a possibility and then framing that possibility within the concerns of a British subcultural audience, regardless of what the film's sexual dynamics might actually suggest to (gay? straight?) viewers from Hong Kong. The 1989 London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, by this time the largest such event in the world, was openly opposed to the Conservative British Government's notorious Section 28 bill, then pass-

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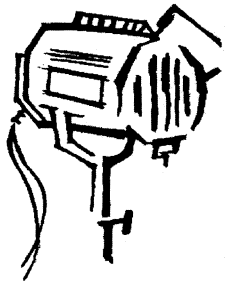
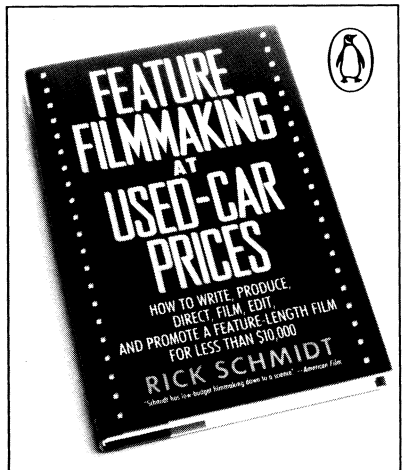
my dream project, the old Chinese classic novel, *The Monkey King*. But you know one has to come from wanting to do something. No matter how clichéd, the major thing that works is the emotion you believe in.

■ Craig D. Reid is a screenwriter and fight director who writes on Chinese film and fight choreography.





"Without Rick's book, CLERKS would have been an idea that never made it past this page."

— Kevin Smith, writer/director, co-producer of CLERKS

ing into law, which prohibits the "promotion" of homosexuality by local government authorities and educational establishments. In mobilizing a dazzling array of films from around the world, the festival's organizers could defy the Tory element by willfully "promoting" the commonality and universality of gay identity.

It might still be argued, however, that a European or North American reading of *Peking Opera Blues* as primarily concerned with gender confusion and sexual role playing is politically partial, not to mention textually blind. The London brochure admits that the film is not explicitly lesbian, but "forgets" that the film could be seen as offensive in its use of stereotyped, effeminate male "actresses." The Peking Opera House itself could also be seen as a symbol of officially sanctioned gender confusion in that it only allows men on stage. Although scenes like the ones in which Sheung Hung is regularly thrown out of the theater's doors and onto the street or Pat Neil is told that in order to play a woman on stage she will have to reincarnate as a man are a literal illustration of gender confusion, such inequality in itself creates transgressive sex roles.

On top of this, there is the much larger question of priorities. Could it be the case that any claims we might want to make as "competent" Western readers when it comes to gender and representation allow us to ignore the larger but perhaps less accessible political crisis? However, the political takes many different forms, and since the film was used positively by the London audience in 1989 (and could be used in such ways again), it is necessary to hold on to the freedom represented by such committed acts of resistance. Moreover, in the context of a broader general interest in Chinese cinema, *Peking Opera Blues* can be said to raise a number of questions about the nature of spectatorial pleasure as currently understood by Western film theorists.

Peking Opera Blues is characteristic of much of Hong Kong cinema in that it approximates the conventions of classic Hollywood cinema, but takes those conventions a step further by its heightened use of invisible editing, crosscutting, points of visual and aural identification, and so on. If the film sometimes seems strange to Western viewers because of its language and iconography, it also looks very familiar in that it plays by the rules of continuity established by the American cinema. In this way, it might have something to say to a Western feminist film practice and criticism that does not reject the pleasures offered by popular cinema, but wishes to see them reorganized. Throughout the 1970s, feminist theorists argued for a negation of easy cinematic pleasure, and it might be that it is only now possible to begin to imagine new, non-oppressive, popular-action narrative cinema. Here, women can do what men can do, but they can also be enjoyed as love and erotic interests without inevitably being submitted to the sadistic scopophilia of the male gaze. In lieu of a more thorough examination of the textual strategies of recent Hong Kong movies, then, it might be suggested that *Peking Opera Blues* represents one example of what such a form of cinema might look like to Western audiences.

Whether *Peking Opera Blues* is understood as a 1997 allegory, a popular text that allows the people of Hong Kong to talk to each other about their unknown tomorrow, or whether its reception in the West merely allows Western critics to bring into their analyses of Chinese cinema the ideological tenets of their own cultural position, it is hard not to be touched by the concerns that energize its narrative. To me, those concerns hide behind a painted smile. Like foundation on an opera singer's cheek, like Hong Kong itself, Tsui Hark's film resembles nothing so much as a holding operation. Reading it in light of the 1997 metadiscourse, it is worth stressing that when Hong Kong's future is different than it is today, *Peking Opera Blues* will have crossed over to mean something else again.

JULIAN STRINGER

■ Julian Stringer, a British-born film student and Hong Kong movie fan, is currently a postgraduate student at Indiana University.

Notes

With thanks to Barbara Klinger for all her help, and also Eugene Eoyang, James Naremore, Margaret M. Yan, and Yingjin Zhang. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Mark Finch.

1. Films with John Woo include *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and *The Killer* (1989); films with Ching Siu Tung include *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987) and *Swordsman II* (1991).
2. Quoted by Pat Aufderheide, "Dynamic duo," *Film Comment* 24, no. 3 (May–June 1988), p. 44.
3. J. Hoberman, *Village Voice*, January 31, 1989, p. 59.
4. Quoted by Lawrence Chua, "Separation anxiety," *Village Voice,* October 4, 1990, p. 74.
5. See Michael C. Davis, "Tiananmen in Hong Kong," in Bih jaw Lin (ed.), *The Aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Crisis in Mainland China* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 364–85.

Review

Peking Opera Blues

Director: Tsui Hark. Executive producer: Claudie Chung Chun. Screenplay: To Kwok-Wai. Cinematographer: Poon Hang-Seng. Editor: David Wu. Music: James Wong. RIM Film Distributors.

Tsui Hark is one of the most famous and prolific of Hong Kong's post-1979 generation of New Wave film-makers. On the basis of the very successful domestic release of titles he has directed for his own Film Workshop production company in Kowloon—including *All the Wrong Clues for the Right Solution* (1981), *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983), *Aces Go Places III* (1984), *Shanghai Blues* (1984), and *Once upon a Time in China* (1991)—as well as production credits for well-known movies by John Woo and Ching Siu Tung,[1] Tsui's work has made the transition to the large Chinese communities of the United States and also to a small section of the white North American and European markets. His films often crop up in retrospectives of modern Cantonese cinema, are regularly shown at international film festivals, and are written about by Western journalists and scholars. Of all his films, it is perhaps the 1986 action-comedy *Peking Opera Blues* that is most often singled out for attention.

Peking Opera Blues is set in China in 1913, two years after the Republican revolution that toppled the Last Emperor, and a time when the country was being fought over by competing warlords. The film opens with General Tsao taking charge of the city palace after the ignoble departure of General Tun. The general's daughter, Tsao Wan (played by Brigitte Lin), has returned from studying overseas to be with her father. Because of her pro-democracy sympathies, she immediately embarks upon a plan to steal, with the help of the young guerrilla Ling Pak Hoi (Mark Cheng), some incriminating documents hidden in the general's safe. The plan fails, but in the process the two revolutionaries meet up with Sheung Hung (Cherie Chung), a gold-digging musician, Pat Neil (Sally Yeh), daughter of the owner of the Peking Opera House, and a young Chinese soldier, Tung Man (Cheung Kwok Keung). The five form an unlikely alliance. Another plan to steal the documents during a Peking Opera performance is foiled by Commander Liu and his men from the "Ticketing Office" (a bunch of extremely violent tax collectors). After this, the plot revolves around a series of disguises, separations, betrayals, rescues, violent confrontations, and narrow escapes. The five friends finally achieve their revolutionary goal, but nothing much happens as a result. An end title tells us that the generals are at it once more; war has broken out, the country has split in two; thus,

Tsui Hark on the set of *A Chinese Ghost Story I*

Craig D. Reid

Interview with Tsui Hark

Vietnamese born, Hong Kong raised, and American trained, 44-year-old Tsui Hark is the acknowledged leader of the New Wave, foreign-trained Hong Kong film-makers. Director, producer, writer, editor, FX supervisor, and part-time actor, Tsui has filmed everything from fantasy, science fiction, and

Rim Film Distributors, Inc.

Pat Neil (Sally Yeh) performs in *Peking Opera Blues*

"the Chinese Democratic Revolution began all over again."

Despite the fact that *Peking Opera Blues* was not picked up by a major American distributor after its initial New York release in 1987, many of the critics who saw the film predicted that—despite its atrociously inadequate and confused subtitles—its accelerated narrative pace, brilliantly choreographed fight scenes, and irresistible star performances could make it a box-office success in the West.

As *Peking Opera Blues* is a cornerstone of the Hong Kong New Wave cinema, and as Hong Kong is likely to elicit more international attention over the next few years because of the extraordinary nature of its current political situation, the film may yet provide a key reference point for Western audiences trying to understand what cinema and life in Hong Kong are all about. Most obviously, the film can take its place among those titles that invite interpretation as allegories about 1997, the year when Hong Kong will revert back to Chinese sovereignty after 99 years of British colonial rule. The arbitrary, short-sighted nature of the original 1898 hand-over treaty between the two countries (with Britain fearing at the time that a more permanent settlement might encourage its international rivals to seek similar economic footholds in the South

horror to comedy, crime, and romance. He consistently produces quality products at breakneck speed, at a fraction of the money spent by most top Hollywood action film-makers.

After graduating in film from the University of Texas, Tsui made a documentary about Chinese garment workers in New York in 1976. Returning to Hong Kong, he made a TV miniseries, "The Gold Dagger Romance" (1978), which was hailed by critics as one of the most important works in the history of Hong Kong television. Tsui first broke onto the international cinematic scene in 1986 with his critically acclaimed, turn-of-the-century, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*-type classic, *Peking Opera Blues*. He has also been credited with developing some of the most violent action epics in the history of cinema—Tsui's long-time collaboration with his friend and colleague John Woo resulted in first a violent cops-and-robbers thriller called *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), and then the cult classic, *The Killer* (1989), a film that dealt with honor and male bonding and brought explosive carnage to new heights. However, it was his fifth film, *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983), a horror-supernatural dazzler, that galvanized audiences and revolutionized a waning Hong Kong film industry.

In more recent years, Tsui has further strengthened his place at the top with his lurid ghost thriller trilogy "A Chinese Ghost Story" (1987–1991), the now classic "Swordsman" trilogy (1990–93), the historical drama epics "Once Upon a Time in China" (1991–95), and his blockbuster sci-fi thriller, *Wicked City* (1993). Tsui shares with his audience an unabashed pleasure in straightforward storytelling. His plots are anchored in his characters, weaving in the guiltless pleasure of stunts, slapstick, wild chases (no cars), and soaring virtuoso displays of gunfire, sword-

China Seas region) is clearly alluded to in the film. Early on, a Chinese warlord meets with representatives from the five foreign banks he is clandestinely doing business with. They tell him how much the dividend on his investment will be after so many years, whereupon the general happily puts his name to the document that will then become the object of a frantic, pro-democracy search. "What will the world look like 47 years later?," he laughs. "Who knows? Give me a pen."

The political implications of such autonomy from, and imminent return to, the mainland provide the point of departure for *Peking Opera Blues*'s narrative. The use of a theatrical setting—most of the action is set in the distinctive Chun Wo Ban, the Peking Opera House of the film's title—is a means to establish one distinct, bordered space within a larger, encroaching space. Furthermore, theatrical disguises, role-playing, and mistaken identities are all used to highlight some very real questions about cultural affiliation. This is a film that explores the ambivalence of Hong Kong's national identity.

In its concern with the attempt of a group of young guerrilla fighters to overthrow the generals and establish democratic rule, the film constructs two kinds of Chinese. The mainland Chinese are the villains; they comprise the national army, the Ticketing Officers and the warlords. The overseas Chinese are the heroes; they include the five revolutionaries, and the denizens of the Opera House. This Good Chinese/Bad Chinese dichotomy is posited as a political confrontation. The generals in Peking cannot comprehend the coexistence of social power, while the guerrilla fighters are concerned with overthrowing monarchism and restoring democracy.

As Tsui Hark himself has put it: "I don't know how the messages come across outside the country, but the film clearly takes a poke at the audience, saying that Chinese people do not know what democracy is. The first democratic revolution collapsed because of a power struggle . . . the film also takes a sly poke at the current Government."[2] According to *Peking Opera Blues*, democracy can only be achieved through violent means as all other avenues of approach have already been foreclosed. In common with many recent films from Hong Kong (such as *A Better Tomorrow*, *The Killer*, *The Wicked City*, and *The Heroic Trio*), this one also indulges in the fantasy of a small group of Good Chinese overcoming all odds to "magically" kill off the Bad Chinese.

Tsui's film style expresses this at every turn. His work has a restless, knife-edge quality that insists on moving a narrative along at breakneck speed—in other words, there is no time left to play with, the present is forever slipping through your fingers, whatever has to be said must be said very quickly. J. Hoberman once described the director as a "comic Eisenstein. . . . [I]t's not just his machine gun editing, but his use of typage, his analysis of circus attractions, his fascination with signs, and his interest in political upheaval that link him to the Soviet master."[3] It might be suggested, in support of such a contention, that in

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play, and emotion. The "Swordsman" films pay homage to the classic Chinese swordplay epics with their imaginative special effects and meticulously choreographed fight scenes and acrobatics. But the trilogy also touches on the subject of 1997, when Britain hands over Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China. And the poor economic situation of futuristic Hong Kong in *Wicked City* is explicitly blamed on the 1997 take-over.

During a recent visit to Hong Kong, I was Tsui's guest at the world premiere of his latest period piece, *Green Snake*, and was able to talk with him about his views on film-making.

REID: *How did you end up in Texas?*

TSUI: There are two ways to get involved in the Chinese film industry. Either you work hard as a continuity person, stunt man, or some sort of assistant in a studio here in Hong Kong or you go overseas to film school. I always wanted to study film. I was so bored after Hong Kong high school that I decided to go to America and study film. My father sent me to the University of Texas, the only school that accepted me. He thought that I was studying medicine; when he discovered I was studying film, he threatened to hang himself.

You first started in Hong Kong, with television miniseries?

When I returned to Hong Kong, the industry was changing and money was available to replace the old generation of film-makers. It was easier to break into television and make those "lian xu zhu" [Kung-fu soap operas] TV miniseries. It was easier to work with video from a filming, editing, and especially from a special-effects point of view. And I learned that I could change structure and tradition.

It wasn't just storytelling but creating an emotion or an impression, and that impression must be rooted in the subconscious. In fact, my most prominent les-

Peking Opera Blues montage is used for the purposes of (Marxist?) political analysis. Although Hoberman doesn't provide textual evidence for his argument, a brief analysis of a short moment from a single scene is enough to bear it out.

As almost every critic who has written about the film has observed, *Peking Opera Blues* is built around three charismatic women who want different things from Chinese society (social change; access to culture and/or men; money in order to be able to escape to another country). When Pat Neil first meets the other two major female characters as they inadvertently enter the grounds of her father's house while trying to hide from the men from the Ticketing Office, their initial interaction establishes, with great economy, just what it is that the women are after. (The shots also confirm the film's interest in establishing female agency as a main narrative drive; the two male characters with them are denied the kind of point-of-view shots granted to their female counterparts.)

The six shot units I want to concentrate on are examples of both Hollywood-style shot/reverse shot configurations, and Soviet-style dialectical montage. An image of each female character looking offscreen is followed, in quick succession, by a shot of what she is looking at. Pat Neil looks first; she sees a handsome guerrilla fighter. Sheung Hung looks next and sees the box that contains the valuable pearls she has been trying to retrieve. The last look is reserved for Tsao Wan; she looks over her shoulder and what she sees is the blood dripping from the wound in the arm of the Chinese soldier she had earlier helped to save. Sexmoneyrevolution. These two final shots are the most telling. The suggestion of violent social conflict is set up dialectically, with a thesis (Tsao Wan's look) and its antithesis (the blood of the soldier) producing a synthesis related to political struggle. Here, as in the numerous famous examples from Eisenstein's *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin*, it is up to the viewer to make the revolutionary connection.

It is also possible to find, in the director's style, a parallel to Eisenstein's desire to achieve synthesis within each individual shot. A recurrent trait of *Peking Opera Blues* is its use of rack focus within single frames to reveal two simultaneous levels of action—more often than not, these levels consist of a Chinese authority figure overseeing a guerrilla fighter, thus linking the Good/Bad Chinese characters in a perpetual power conflict.

At first glance (given the Western tendency to follow narratives through a single protagonist), it might seem as if it is one person, Tsao Wan, who is the character most likely to see the "heroic" project through. Certainly she is an extraordinary woman: she studied gynecology overseas; sports short hair and dons mannish suits; she rescues her male and female comrades and is rescued by them; she can come across as a loving, vulnerable daughter or an ambitious, zealous revolutionary; she cherishes genuine female friendship but also connives to get what she wants even from the people closest to her. Above all, and this occurs in a scene that has no equivalent in any Western

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Jet Li in *Swordsman II*

son in film-making occurred while studying television direction in the States. I was a cameraman filming a dance routine inside a studio. My professor told me not just to look in front of the camera but also behind the camera for something interesting. When I turned around, I saw shadows of the dancers. He taught me to always look for things that most people weren't looking for or at.

Why didn't you follow the standard supernatural horror genre mold?

When I ventured into the genre, everyone believed that horror films had to have hopping vampires, green-skinned ghosts, or monsters. But there are many ways to create a horror film. You can create a monster or use daily-life psychological things. I didn't want to imitate the American productions so I decided to make a horror film that a Chinese

film I can think of, she is capable of withstanding ruthless torture by the authorities.

Tsao Wan's position is established by the first scene in which she appears. She is initially introduced in relation to her father. At the beginning of the film, he is the most powerful warlord in China—more than that, since he is fighting with other warlords for absolute rule of the country, there is a sense in which Tsao Wan's father is "China." This early scene also introduces most of the narrative themes, and I read it as being constructed so as to have a great symbolic importance for the domestic Hong Kong audience. After a suspected guerrilla attack on his trigger-happy army has been thwarted, the general turns in the carriage he is sharing with his daughter in order to reassure her of their safety. He takes her hand: "Wan, are you scared?" "I'm alright, Papa." "You've been away and living in comfort for years. Now you have to get used to the way of living of your native land." "I'll certainly make it."

That last line, which I've quoted directly from the film's English subtitles, constitutes Tsao Wan's crucial response to her return to the mainland, her subordination once again to the authority of Chinese leaders. It is not hard to see how her words are related very precisely to the social problem that provides the main contextual discourse surrounding the production of *Peking Opera Blues*.

In 1984, after two years of formal negotiations, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher flew to Beijing for the official signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Future of Hong Kong, the treaty that would lay out the terms for the handover 13 years later. The details of this arrangement provoked mixed reactions. While the optimists in Hong Kong looked forward to reunification with the "Motherland," the pessimists felt that Britain had not established sufficient grounds for the maintenance of democratic rights once China reannexed their country. They felt that the old European masters wanted to take what they could before the new masters arrived, and had therefore betrayed Hong Kong by not looking out for its interests. Tsui Hark must be counted as one of these pessimists—as he is often taken to be the great cynic of modern Hong Kong cinema.

"Hong Kong people find themselves in a helpless situation" he once explained. "They keep on thinking it's going to get better and better, and suddenly it's a nightmare. They have no petition in deciding their future, they have no voice, no rights. Nothing."[4] In *Shanghai Blues*, where a once bustling, cosmopolitan trading city is sucked dry by a Japanese takeover, Tsui used the historical tragedy of Shanghai as an analogy to the potential disaster represented by 1997, while for the third installment of the "Better Tomorrow" series (*Love and Death in Saigon*, 1989), he implied the same thing through a story about the problems of getting in and out of war-torn Vietnam.

With hindsight, it might be suggested that Tsui Hark's cynicism was proven to be justified in that it foreshadowed the events that occurred in China on June 4, 1989. The massacre of student protesters by

Joey Wang in *A Chinese Ghost Story III*

audience could relate to. Since it was based on a traditional tale, we called it *A Chinese Ghost Story*. The problem was how to make a horror film *and* make it romantic. Because this horror film didn't use a lot of ugly monstrous creatures and gory blood and guts, it was essential to focus in on other elements. Sure there was a giant-tongued monster and there were ghosts, but it was necessary to emphasize the psychological things, things that people face every day in their lives, then to exaggerate them to the point where they were scary.

In many of your films the theme of love takes a unique twist: you seem predisposed toward unearthly creatures falling in love with mortal man.

Chinese Government troops in and around Beijing's Tiananmen Square shocked the people of Hong Kong and threw the two countries into a diplomatic crisis. Amid unprecedented scenes of public mourning and grief (the center of Hong Kong was occupied on June 5 by nearly one million people), pessimism was proved prescient. Now, the settlement began to perceive 1997 as a threat that had suddenly become all too real. At the same time, the language coming out of China changed. Up until this point, diplomatic relations between Beijing and London had been concerned with projecting the joint aspiration for Hong Kong of "one country, two systems," but that was now transformed into the language of subversion. China proclaimed that it would not allow itself to be undermined by Hong Kong "guerrillas," and reiterated that Hong Kong was Chinese, and would be expected to follow the rule of Chinese law.[5]

In June, 1989, then, people from Hong Kong were viewed by the mainland Chinese leaders in the same way that they are viewed by the generals and warlords of *Peking Opera Blues*, namely as guerrilla fighters, terrorists, and ordinary people seeking to undermine official Chinese authority. The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Movement in China, formed in the optimism of May, became a troublesome organization that had to be eliminated. *Peking Opera Blues* can be seen to be politically prescient in that it is using this language of subversion three years before Tiananmen Square.

In the West, too, it might now be easier to perceive how the film's seductive, fantasylike qualities are put into the service of a very real political despair. Consider the movement of the narrative in relation to the British Government's reaction to Tiananmen Square. On June 6, the then Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, stood up in the Houses of Parliament in London to make the speech that would constitute the official British response to the massacre and would explain the implications of the Chinese Army's actions to the inhabitants of the British Empire's last major colony. He said that although Her Majesty's Government was most concerned about what China had just done, the 3.25 million British Dependent Territory citizens in Hong Kong would not be given the right of abode in the United Kingdom because "they will appreciate the reasons why we could not easily contemplate a massive new immigration commitment which would more than double the ethnic minority population of the United Kingdom—a possibility that cannot be disregarded." Such a treacherous about-turn in immigration policy adds bitter irony to the explanation of how it is possible to read *Peking Opera Blues* as a film in which the much-noted energy of popular Hong Kong cinema is channeled into a clear social dynamic—here, the characters are not just breathlessly running around, they are *running away.*

The movie opens on this note. One warlord has lost money to another in a few games of mah jongg. As he cannot now afford to pay his army, the soldiers are about to riot. In a scene of panic and impending (comic) violence, he decides to flee, taking all his

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I believe that romance is the key to the success of all action films. Love is very difficult to express in Chinese culture, so in my films I like to have a romantic touch where the nonhuman looks for love. The simple, single-minded people avoiding love survive. It's the intellectuals who have the most complicated attitudes that won't survive.

Emotion is the most essential element in my films, even the "Swordsman" films, which are about hatred, conflict, and brotherhood. But mostly they're full of hope. However, I feel that to do a film just to appease or generate feelings of pity... well, it's a flimsy reason to make a film. But one always needs hope, and the films are about bringing friends together with the help of song. The trilogy is a parody on the Cultural Revolution, reflecting the hatreds of splitting up but eventually getting back together.

Are you pleased with your new film, Green Snake?

In this film we used some new computerized special effects, but we had too many time constraints. In Hong Kong, long before a film is finished, it is already scheduled to play in the theaters. If it is not ready, it will not be seen. All the work will be for nothing.

The technical parts of *Green Snake* were disturbing; the results didn't come out the way we wanted. But I believe these old-style films are popular because they are so unrealistic. People live in small places within themselves, and they need a place to escape, and lots of stuff in these films offers them the opportunity to escape. These period piece films are based on old Chinese novels and I believe there is a resurgence in interest in these kinds of stories.

With 1997 drawing so close, it seems there is a mass exodus of Hong Kong talent leaving the country. What are your thoughts on that?

Many people have left, are planning to leave.

(From left) Sally Yeh, Cherie Chung, and Brigitte Lin

Rim Film Distributors, Inc.

remaining wealth with him. This first warlord later returns to Peking after the second has himself been forced to depart. After this, the theme of running away is habitually returned to. For example, after refusing to become a "husband" to the Head of the Ticketing Office, Fa, the Opera House star singer, exits through one of its windows, heading for another province.

One scene is of particular importance in relation to the theme of running away: the three heroines, all from different social classes and so representative of a certain political unity, are relaxing and drinking together in Tsao Wan's home—in other words, in the domain of her father, the most powerful warlord in Peking, the epitome of China itself. They gather around a globe and Sheung Hung frantically searches its surface with a magnifying glass. As the conversation continues, the scene switches from light-hearted comedy to melancholic sadness.

They are doing anything they can to get green cards and visas. Too many people expect something for nothing; that is why people fear the Communist takeover. But I'll just wait and see. In fact, when I returned to Hong Kong, I found it tough to adapt. In the early 1980s, material for film was more personal, about daily life. Suddenly now we're talking about the nation, and Hong Kong audiences have become concerned over what will happen in 1997. Now, they're making short-term plans, and they're looking for something: Where are they going to go? So now a character in a film is more politically conscious, reflecting that anxiety.

One essential difference I see in your films compared to many other Hong Kong films is that you don't waste time; each scene really moves the film forward.

This is one of the key concepts that members invited into my Film Workshop Company must abide by. My criteria for members are: You must develop your own style; there must be content, everything must have a point to it, even the Kung-fu fights; and films must appeal to the masses. A commercial film must be entertaining and make a person feel good. Otherwise, sooner or later, the audience will confront you. They'll say, "I don't believe it." Sometimes, even after 20 minutes of a film, I don't know what it's about. That's bad; the director can explain the logic to you all he wants and it doesn't matter. The masses go to feel, not to understand.

What's next for you?

I'd like to do some pure comedy. But I still want to continue doing period pieces, and of course I still have

Sheung Hung: The world is so big. Where can I go?

Tsao Wan: Are you planning to go somewhere?

Sheung Hung: Everyone is running away. Running for life.

Pat Neil: But this is a nice place. Why do we have to run away?

Tsao Wan: We're running around, and finally we go back the same route.

This obvious reference to 1997 exhibits an unmistakable concern with the idea of migrating in order to find a better future. But it is not clear exactly what kind of future it will be.

Audiences who are not too concerned about the 1997 factor as it manifests itself in recent Hong Kong movies have seen the film as explicitly political, but they tend to focus on different issues. Most have remarked on the highly suggestive gender politics of *Peking Opera Blues*, and in particular on its confusion of sex roles brought about by the use of a theatrical setting and the presence of three strong female leads. Specifically, these female protagonists initiate much of the action with their flamboyant energy. It is also worth pointing out in this regard not just the democratic spread of the group of five guerrilla fighters as a *whole*, all exhibiting equal bravery, equal beauty, equal comic skills, and taking up relatively equal amounts of screen time, but also the way in which the film organizes and presents their interrelationship. I am thinking here of how, when the film starts, we are presented with a dashing, fantastically athletic young male hero, Ling Pak Hoi. After a while, however, he tends to slip into the background as the ingenuity and bravery of each individual woman is stressed. When the young hero finally does save Tsao Wan, right at the end of the film, by pulling her to safety on the rooftops, it is not that much of a heroic gesture—he just happens to be in the right place at the right time.

When *Peking Opera Blues* was shown at the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in October, 1989, it was presented as a film about cross-dressing. According to the Festival's publicity brochure, "It's against the context of how women usually behave in films that the adventurous heroine of *Peking Opera Blues* [i.e., Tsao Wan] becomes so appealing (well, OK, she also looks pretty cute in a suit) [sic]. Her role defies categorizing, upending all the usual expectations with no explanation. *Peking Opera Blues* also compounds its status by refusing to patronize its other female characters."

In recognizing that Tsui Hark's movie is not an "explicitly lesbian film," the festival organizers were picking up on a possibility and then framing that possibility within the concerns of a British subcultural audience, regardless of what the film's sexual dynamics might actually suggest to (gay? straight?) viewers from Hong Kong. The 1989 London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, by this time the largest such event in the world, was openly opposed to the Conservative British Government's notorious Section 28 bill, then pass-

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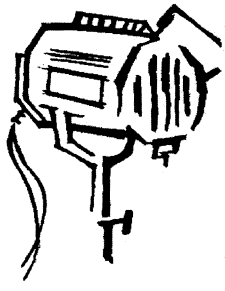
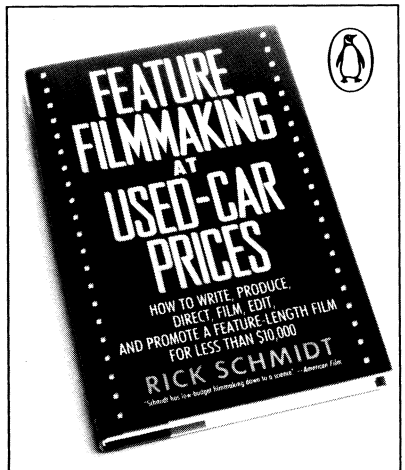
my dream project, the old Chinese classic novel, *The Monkey King*. But you know one has to come from wanting to do something. No matter how clichéd, the major thing that works is the emotion you believe in.

■ Craig D. Reid is a screenwriter and fight director who writes on Chinese film and fight choreography.





"Without Rick's book, CLERKS would have been an idea that never made it past this page."

— Kevin Smith, writer/director, co-producer of CLERKS

Book Reviews

American-Jewish Filmmakers

Traditions and Trends

By David Desser and Lester D. Friedman. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993. $44.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

American-Jewish Filmmakers undertakes a difficult challenge in tracing the cultural patterns that influenced a postwar generation of moviegoers and in focusing on four major film-makers with a specific cultural link. Individual books have appeared on at least three of the four directors discussed at length here—Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, Sidney Lumet, and Paul Mazursky—but very few have attempted to trace the formative traditions of American-Jewish art that have influenced them. This book is an extremely engaging and stimulating attempt to define one of the most significant (and continuing) aspects of Hollywood cinema—the American-Jewish experience and influence. Concentrating on these four figures but including chapters on others, the authors place them cinematically within the 1960s context that allowed them a freedom of expression unknown to earlier generations of American-Jewish film-makers. The members of this group "turned to Jewish themes and characters to take advantage of the ethnic sensibility characteristic of contemporary American culture," utilizing "models drawn from other, earlier Jewish forays into art and popular culture." (3) This dialogical exchange between a Jewish cultural past and contemporary American cinematic tradition forms the focus of this work.

The opening chapter deals with the relevant traditions of American-Jewish art, particularly those involving humor, social justice, and changing life styles—and especially those resulting from assimilation. The bildungsroman tradition, used to emphasize the urban setting, social justice, and marginalized existence of Jewish characters, is also a strong influence here. Although explicitly religious elements play only a small role, Judaism exists as a key structuring absence within many of the film-makers' works—such as *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *The Producers*, and *Daniel*. The authors believe that "many of the films of Allen, Brooks, Lumet and Mazursky that do not focus on overtly Jewish characters still reveal the influences of the American-Jewish experience." (32)

Humor plays a particular role in the diverse screen personas of Woody Allen and Mel Brooks, who both began their careers in the Golden Age of 1950s television comedy emerging from the New York area. Comedy also plays a key role in their films and those of Mazursky, often functioning, as the authors suggest (quoting Robert Alter), as a "process of ironic or playful domestication of myth." (12) However, this humorous element often performs a serious function. The autors note of their selected directors that all four "seem particularly obsessed with intense examinations of self-definition. They relentlessly explore their relationship to the Jewish elements of their background and how that background both ties them and divides them from the rest of American society. Their personal problems, therefore, often revolve around examination of the greater society, their insights piercing deeply into American majority and minority culture." (21)

The films of modern philosophical schlemiel Woody Allen exhibit both a particular bildungsroman tradition—the search for identity within American culture—as well as Judaism's structuring absence. The authors see his cinema as a "constant working out of this missing link, a continual search for a substitute for Judaism," (41) particularly from his middle period onwards (beginning with *Annie Hall*, 1977). *Zelig*, especially, captures the problematic motif of assimilation with its greater self-reflexivity. Less canonized but perhaps more interesting than Allen, Mel Brooks, with his cinematic fart-like humor, mediates an angrier response to social issues. As Brooks once said in reference to *The Producers*, "My comedy is based on rage." As well as highlighting Brooks's often neglected connection with Brooksfilms (his production company for more serious subjects, such as *Elephant Man*), the authors trace the director's fascination with parody, beginning with his early work on Sid Caesar's "Your Show of Shows." Quoting Henri Bergson's "Transpose the solemn into the familiar and the result is parody," (109) Desser and Friedman associate Brooks's films with classical Swiftian satire and postmodernist parody. His films also reveal a passionate concern with human justice and universal fallibility.

If the Brooksfilms productions reveal the director's serious side, another interesting fusion occurs in Lumet's more multiculturally focused work. "Allen's finest achievements spring from comedy, yet he often ranges into dramas; Lumet's major efforts arise in drama, but he often works within comedy as well." (161)

Central to Lumet's work is a concern with the family, either literal (*Running on Empty*) or surrogate (*Prince of the City*). The authors examine Lumet's work with a particular focus on *The Pawnbroker* and *The Book of Daniel,* noting that Lumet is a director who specifically deals with social justice themes.

Paul Mazursky's films, like those of Lumet, reveal the cultural traits of finding spiritual meaning in a material world (*Blume in Love*) and the motif of assimilation (*Down and Out in Beverly Hills*). However, this chapter is the weakest in the entire book. This is less the authors' fault than that of a director whose work never reaches the intensity of the other three discussed here. The authors see Mazursky's work as a disturbing indictment of a financially successful Jewish generation (of the 1980s) "bereft of its cultural, religious, and ethical moorings." (134) For Mazursky, growing up Jewish in America leads to anger, craziness, or a mixture of both.

The book concludes with brief examinations of Elaine May, Mike Nichols, Carl Reiner, Arthur Penn, Sydney Pollack, and Steven Spielberg. The authors criticize Spielberg's infantile, escapist avoidance of themes explored seriously by other directors. (293) A tantalizingly brief section suggests further exploration to deepen the insights.

Other marginal talents remain unmentioned. Larry Cohen's brand of satirical parody and the television work of Jeremy Paul Kagan deserved some reference. While Cohen's iconoclastic work is an acquired taste, it fits in with many of the motifs of parody, multicultural explorations, New York urban fascination, and social justice mentioned in the book. Jeremy Paul Kagan's two remarkable television movies, *Katherine* (1975) and *Conspiracy: The Trial of the Chicago 8* (1987), also relate to key family and social justice themes respectively. But these are just minor points.

American-Jewish Filmmakers engages its readers in a general introduction and basic analysis of a field worthy of more exploration. The four figures discussed in this work are all well within the mainstream. Further work is necessary on independent and avant-garde work within this cultural continuum, as well as other detailed explorations of intersecting factors of race, class, and gender. As an undergraduate student, Mike Robbins, pointed out to me, Allen is the one director of those discussed here who has explored many aspects of women's roles in his films, extending far beyond the Jewish male's fascination with the shiksa. Problematic as Allen's various female protagonists are, they need an in-depth study that would go beyond treating them as signifiers of male insecurity. However, it is easy to point out certain gaps in the analysis undertaken by Desser and Friedman. It is even more important to point to further studies in an area they have opened up. Although *American-Jewish Filmmakers* risks the pitfalls inherent in any survey approach, it serves as a stimulating cartographic effort for future explorers.

TONY WILLIAMS

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Blood Cinema

The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain

By Marsha Kinder. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 1993. $45.00 cloth; $17.00 paper.

The title of Marsha Kinder's ambitious and perceptive study risks reconfirming that identification of Spain with a passionate, bodily language which other nationalities are spared; and the subtitle will raise eyebrows: why speak of "reconstruction" when the history of Spain in the twentieth century is of the shift from a violently imposed single identity to a plurality of diverse regionalisms? However, as Kinder's introduction reveals, it is her concern to call into question stereotypical notions of Spanishness. Kinder briskly sets out the parameters of her study here: it is not a historical survey, thus allowing for free movements back and forward between periods; nor is it an auteur-based work, in spite of the stand-alone chapters on Buñuel and Borau; nor is it wholly a discussion of the "national context" of Spanish cinema, (2) stressing as it does such "international dimensions" as the particular reception of Hollywood in an isolated Francoist Spain and, more recently, a Socialist cultural policy dedicated to the promotion of a modernized image of Spain abroad. (7, 8) Kinder thus aims to fill two gaps: importing film theory into Spanish studies (which has until recently resisted it), and Spanish film into film studies (which has tended to exclude or patronize it). (9) Kinder organizes her work around four broad principles: transcultural reinscription, violence and the Oedipus, exile, and micro- and macro-regionalism.

Tracing in the first chapter the curious conflation of neorealism and Hollywood in Spanish film of the 1950s, Kinder notes the ideological complexity of both cinematic genres and Francoist ideology and offers excellent close readings, highlighting "ruptures" in the use of crosscutting or in the dynamic of foreground and background. Generic concerns continue in the next chapter, where the disavowal of neorealism in the Saura and Ferreri of the 1950s is juxtaposed with Erice's *Spirit of*

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The book concludes with brief examinations of Elaine May, Mike Nichols, Carl Reiner, Arthur Penn, Sydney Pollack, and Steven Spielberg. The authors criticize Spielberg's infantile, escapist avoidance of themes explored seriously by other directors. (293) A tantalizingly brief section suggests further exploration to deepen the insights.

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American-Jewish Filmmakers engages its readers in a general introduction and basic analysis of a field worthy of more exploration. The four figures discussed in this work are all well within the mainstream. Further work is necessary on independent and avant-garde work within this cultural continuum, as well as other detailed explorations of intersecting factors of race, class, and gender. As an undergraduate student, Mike Robbins, pointed out to me, Allen is the one director of those discussed here who has explored many aspects of women's roles in his films, extending far beyond the Jewish male's fascination with the shiksa. Problematic as Allen's various female protagonists are, they need an in-depth study that would go beyond treating them as signifiers of male insecurity. However, it is easy to point out certain gaps in the analysis undertaken by Desser and Friedman. It is even more important to point to further studies in an area they have opened up. Although *American-Jewish Filmmakers* risks the pitfalls inherent in any survey approach, it serves as a stimulating cartographic effort for future explorers.

TONY WILLIAMS

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Blood Cinema

The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain

By Marsha Kinder. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 1993. $45.00 cloth; $17.00 paper.

The title of Marsha Kinder's ambitious and perceptive study risks reconfirming that identification of Spain with a passionate, bodily language which other nationalities are spared; and the subtitle will raise eyebrows: why speak of "reconstruction" when the history of Spain in the twentieth century is of the shift from a violently imposed single identity to a plurality of diverse regionalisms? However, as Kinder's introduction reveals, it is her concern to call into question stereotypical notions of Spanishness. Kinder briskly sets out the parameters of her study here: it is not a historical survey, thus allowing for free movements back and forward between periods; nor is it an auteur-based work, in spite of the stand-alone chapters on Buñuel and Borau; nor is it wholly a discussion of the "national context" of Spanish cinema, (2) stressing as it does such "international dimensions" as the particular reception of Hollywood in an isolated Francoist Spain and, more recently, a Socialist cultural policy dedicated to the promotion of a modernized image of Spain abroad. (7, 8) Kinder thus aims to fill two gaps: importing film theory into Spanish studies (which has until recently resisted it), and Spanish film into film studies (which has tended to exclude or patronize it). (9) Kinder organizes her work around four broad principles: transcultural reinscription, violence and the Oedipus, exile, and micro- and macro-regionalism.

Tracing in the first chapter the curious conflation of neorealism and Hollywood in Spanish film of the 1950s, Kinder notes the ideological complexity of both cinematic genres and Francoist ideology and offers excellent close readings, highlighting "ruptures" in the use of crosscutting or in the dynamic of foreground and background. Generic concerns continue in the next chapter, where the disavowal of neorealism in the Saura and Ferreri of the 1950s is juxtaposed with Erice's *Spirit of*

the Beehive of 1973. Here Kinder gives an excellent historical account of the reception of the first two directors and the way in which Saura was "transformed into a cultural commodity" serving the interest of both *franquismo* and the international market. (93)

Chapter 4 initiates the discussion of violence, beginning with a catalogue of cinematic cruelty to be found not in low-budget slashers but in respected works subsidized by the Ministry of Culture. (137) There is some brisk and dense writing here, calling attention to the paradox by which the critiques of the violence effected in the name of orthodoxy were obliged to mimic that same violence. Drawing mainly on Girard's versions of sacrifice and massacre, Kinder offers an excellent account of the pormanteau movie *The Challenges* and other works of the 1960s. An analysis of *Pascual Duarte* (1974) and the famously perverse *Behind the Glass* (1986) notes the reversibility of matched gazes. (189) Turning to the Spanish Oedipus, the next chapter treats the disturbing frequency of matricide in Spanish film. (198) Ranging from the Transition to the contemporary period and jumping back to the most florid expressions of Francoism, Kinder notes time and again the presence of an aggressive female sexuality, of the sublimated queer Oedipal backstory of Laius. Kinder even seeks to vindicate for feminism Bigas Luna's notoriously sexist *Bilbao*, noting that in spite of the fact that the film repeatedly reproduces the male point of view, the audience remains as detached from the masculine subject position as it does from the feminine object. (266) The stress on the specifically Spanish reworking of the Oedipus in these chapters is highly valuable.

"Exile and Diaspora" comprises twin chapters on Buñuel and Borau. Here the approach is more historical than psychoanalytic, with the reading of Buñuel taking his "hybridity" in the context of technologies of sound and relations between Spain, Mexico, and France. Kinder stresses how the patriarchal legacy is subverted by young women and offers exemplary readings of both early and late films. Kinder rightly takes to task previous critics for wholly neglecting Buñuel's Spanish context, while insisting (rightly once more) that neither the auteurist nor the national perspective is sufficient alone. The lengthy account of Borau's *On the Line* in chapter 7 calls attention to a director little known abroad. There is a detailed account here of cultural policy in the 1980s (citing John Hopewell) and a minute account of the film's troubled history of production and distribution. While this is sometimes over-reverent, Kinder is to be congratulated for her insistence that "Spanish" film need not be made in Spain and must not be constrained by foreign conceptions of its national limits.

The final chapter charts the micro-regionalism of broadcasting in contemporary Catalunya. (392) Kinder then jumps back to the lost Catalan masterpiece of 1948, *Life in Shadows*, before concluding with an analysis of the reception of two flawed international coproductions of the last ten years. Here a stress on the macro-regional leads to the "risk of cultural erasure"; even a challenging film such as Almodóvar's *The Law of Desire* was coopted into the government campaign to promote modernization of Spain's image abroad. (432) Kinder ends with a brief epilogue noting the ambiguity of signs for the future: the dire financial crisis of 1993 is contrasted with the emergence of a sophisticated and prize-winning film such as Erice's *Quince Tree Sun*.

There is no doubt that *Blood Cinema* is a very substantial achievement by any standards. I know of no comparable study in English or Spanish. Among its strengths are an encyclopedic knowledge of Spanish film; a subtle understanding of the ideological complexity of formal technique; an impressive knowledge of the history of the industry in Spain; and a consistently feminist and queer-friendly approach to some of the best of Spanish film scholars whose work is sometimes inaccessible (José Luis Guarner, Román Gubern, Agustín Sánchez Vidal).

Any criticism of *Blood Cinema* must begin, then, by acknowledging the magnitude of the work and the undeniable stature of its author's contribution to Spanish film studies. My reservations can be traced back to Kinder's opening remarks. First, there is the disavowal of historical survey and the assertion of the freedom to move backward in time. This approach has many advantages. It avoids the temptation to impose a falsely linear trajectory on the wayward movement of an industry in perpetual crisis. And sometimes the juxtapositions prove illuminating, as when disturbing similarities are raised between sacrificial Falangist narratives and contestatory movies of the 1960s. Elsewhere, the comparisons seem forced, and the specificity of some films is sometimes neglected in the interests of a more general argument. This leads on to my second reservation—Kinder's rejection of auteurism, which leads to the consequence that "several of Spain's most accomplished filmmakers . . . and many of their best works receive less attention than some readers might expect or desire." (2) Prospective buyers seduced by the still from *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* on *Blood Cinema*'s cover might wonder why Borau is so much more prominent than Almodóvar. At a length of more than 500 pages, surely it is not for lack of space? And if the issues chosen to structure the volume marginalize major film-makers and works, then might this not suggest that the selection of those issues be reexamined? The third question is that of national context. Rightly refusing to be limited to a restricted definition of the term, Kinder writes "on the line" between Hispanism and film studies in general. And *Blood Cinema* amply displays the rewards that come when a film scholar devotes herself to a national field in which she

was not initially a specialist. However, the assumption of a dual audience, doubly disadvantaged by ignorance of Hispanism or film theory, sometimes leads to unnecessary prolixity. The central issues would have stood out even more strongly with a little editing. Finally, there is perhaps a problem with a term mentioned earlier: subversion. This is something of a leitmotif in *Blood Cinema*, attached to films and auteurs at all periods and in multiple contexts. Kinder sometimes seems too willing to believe that, say, Almodóvar's fetishization of the maternal voice leads to the "subversion of patriarchy" or that the subversive narrative ruptures of Buñuel's late films "undermine the stability of all meanings." (257, 332) The connections between the psychic, the formal, and the social are here assumed rather than examined.

These points, however, in no way detract from the importance of *Blood Cinema*. When the excellent stills are supplemented by the CD-ROM of extracts and commentary (not yet available at the time of writing), it will prove invaluable to all students of Spanish film.

PAUL JULIAN SMITH

■ Paul Julian Smith is Head of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Cambridge, England.

Blood Cinema: A Bilingual CD-Rom Exploring Spanish Film and Culture contains over 55 minutes of full-motion video (17 brief excerpts from 15 films discussed in the book), with detailed audio commentaries in English and Spanish and historical overviews of the larger conceptual issues. Illustrations include movie stills, publicity photos, paintings, drawings, and maps. Production credits, glossary, bibliography and notepad. Available in Macintosh format only ($75.00) from: Cine-Discs, 2021 Holly Hill Terrace, Los Angeles, CA 90068. (213) 876-7678. (Please add $1.50 shipping.)

Cinemania '94 CD-ROM

Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 1994. $59.95.

On the information superhighway, the 1994 version of *Cinemania*[1] is a rest area that wants to be a drive-in. But it has real potential as a parking lot.

Cinemania is a multimedia CD-ROM that comes in Mac and PC versions; this review deals only with the PC (Windows) version. It is designed and marketed as an "interactive movie guide" for the home computer. In other words, it's a high-tech way of deciding which movies you might want to watch on TV or rent at the video store, as well as of learning more about particular films, film technology, and film-makers. But it is also, almost, a serious research tool. Even in its present form, it's the most useful database of film credits available.

Cinemania contains, in searchable electronic form, a number of books that, whatever you may think of them as critical texts, contain a tremendous amount of information about films (title, release year, length, country of origin, director, cast, etc.) and film-makers (short biographies and often complete filmographies). The books included in their entirety are Leonard Maltin's *Movie and Video Guide 1994*, Pauline Kael's *5001 Nights at the Movies*, Baseline's *The Encyclopedia of Film* (edited by James Monaco), and *Roger Ebert's Video Companion.* There are also significant extracts from the first edition of Ephraim Katz's *The Film Encyclopedia*, *The Motion Picture Guide* and its *1993 Annual*, and Monaco's *How to Read a Film.* If Baseline doesn't have a biography of Lois Weber, *Cinemania* provides the Weber entry from Katz. If Maltin and Kael reviewed a movie but Ebert didn't, there is no access-Ebert button displayed for that title. If the film got an X, it will probably not be found here; of the 19,346 movies covered individually in *Cinemania*, most of which are features, only 26 were rated X or NC-17. If you do preliminary biographic and filmographic research—or quick and dirty searches—with these books anyway, this is a convenient way to look up a lot of interrelated material at once, and it's simpler than keeping a finger in one book while you flip through another. And another.

If there were nothing in *Cinemania* but words, it could contain the complete credits of every movie ever made, or the complete reviews and obits from *Variety* with the *AFI Catalog* thrown in for good measure. Sound and image files take up much more space than text files; they also help the sales of multimedia CD-ROMs. Most of the data space on this disk has been used for video clips, recordings, and stills. Of these materials, the stills—a portrait to accompany a biography, a production still to illustrate a movie—take the least disk space and have been chosen well. The recordings of film music and of dialogue are evocative if you can stand the way great scores and scripts are turned into sound bites.

The video clips, however, are a waste of space; they come from 20 movies, and each lasts a minute or two. The video playback is jerky at best (even with 8MB of RAM—and disk-catching makes it worse); Windows video *aspires* to 15 fps. The resolution is barely acceptable if the video clip is played in a small window; even

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then, the motion is stuttery and the sync intermittent. If the clip is played full-screen, the frame changes resemble those in a fast slide projector, the pixels become boxes, and lip-sync is out of the question. Video display and synchronization preferences can be adjusted in Windows itself, and some systems will give better results if they are set to skip frames in order to keep up with the sound. But nostalgia is better satisfied with a trip to a real theater or even a real television. Nevertheless, no matter how many reference works could have fit in the space devoted to the clips from *Becket* and *Dances with Wolves*, *Cinemania* does allow you to see a picture of Griffith, read a short biography of him, examine his credits, and watch part of a battle scene from *The Birth of a Nation*. And while you may find it silly to play a scene from *2001* in a 2-inch window, it could be fun to copy the *2001* dialogue to your hard disk and make your computer say "I'm afraid, Dave . . . My mind is going . . . " whenever you exit Windows.

As a more or less searchable database, *Cinemania* is a web of interconnected articles and lists that can be accessed from within one another. Thanks to hypertext links, any words in one article that are also the title of any article in *Cinemania* (for instance, "Ingrid Bergman" in a review of *Casablanca*) will be highlighted in a color of your choice; click the mouse on the highlighted words, and that article replaces the one you've been reading. In this example, clicking on "Ingrid Bergman" puts the *Casablanca* review in storage—so that you can readily return to it, or any item you've looked at during the current session—and presents the biography entry "Ingrid Bergman," which offers her portrait and the biography from Baseline's *Encyclopedia of Film*, equipped with a button that takes you to a list of her Oscar nominations and Academy Awards—regrettably, the only awards tracked in *Cinemania*—and another button that delivers Baseline's list of her credits. These buttons are presented on something that looks like a remote control, a significant choice for the navigator through this "cinematic" system. It's not true of most of the books reproduced here, but the emphasis of the product as a whole is on film as video.

Hypertext and buttons do not link every instance of the highlighted words, however, only the items with those words in their titles—such as, in this case, "Ingrid Bergman Filmography." An item might be a review, a biography, a filmography, a topical article, a glossary item, a still, a caption, a recording, or a clip. With these tools alone, you could—to coin a nasty phrase—infosurf from *Casablanca* to Bergman to her credit on *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to its Maltin-review credits and thereby to Sam Wood, then back to *Casablanca* and into a biography of Michael Curtiz, a still in which "As Time Goes By" is played, a recording of the song, and a clip during which Bergman listens to the song and Bogart storms in.

Beyond hypertext and control buttons, the more complex search tools in *Cinemania*, which allow you to find entries on movies, people, or film-making topics from three separate sets of menus, are easy to use but are likewise limited to items with the key text in their titles. As efficient as it is, the dominant search engine suffers from the illusion of comprehensiveness, and it's necessary to figure out how the program works and go beyond its user-friendly features to locate what ought, in future versions of the product, to be made easier to find. For now, in order to find every use of the words "Ingrid Bergman" anywhere in *Cinemania*—for example, a mention of her in an article on Rossellini—there is a separate "Find Word" search tool that can do the job. And if you want to find out about TriStar, which is not in the list of studios on the topical-articles menu, you have to know enough to look for it under Columbia.

The dominant search engine can be thought of as a set of filters, with different filters applied within the categories of movies, biographies, and topics; thus biographies can be searched by gender, but movies cannot. It can find every film made by a certain director, with up to two particular performers, in any year(s) from 1914 to 1993, in a particular genre; it can even narrow the field by MPAA rating and asterisk rating (one star, 1940, that's for me!), but it does not allow you to search in a similar manner for films by a particular writer, or writer-director team, let alone two directors. The movie-search engine needs to add two blank fields into which you could enter any name or category, as well as additional filters for studios and for crafts beyond those of director and performer, such as cinematographer. If you want to find every film on which a director and producer collaborated—Wise and Lewton, for example—"Find Word" will turn up every article that includes the words "Wise" and "Lewton," and you can read them and compile a list of titles as you go.

So, once you've found all this data, what's it worth? The short answer is that *Cinemania* is almost as reliable as its sources.

There are, of course, errors in some of the books. The further problem is that not all the information in the books has been transferred correctly or completely. Many of the filmographies are inconsistent in capitalization, especially of foreign titles, and the majority contain no accents. (This is not an electronic problem; some of the entries do contain accents, and all of them make free use of upper and lower case. The biography of Marker has accents for the "Société" in SLON but not for *La Jetée*.) Katz has a Méliès filmography; *Cinemania* has none. If you look up Griffith's Biographs in the printed Katz *Encyclopedia*, you'll find them listed in chrono-

logical order. But if you look them up in *Cinemania*, you'll find them listed alphabetically within their year of release; this is the way many electronic timelines prefer to store information, but it is much less useful than what the makers of *Cinemania* started out with.

You can't write to a CD-ROM, but with *Cinemania* you can do something pretty close to writing in the margins: you can reconcile conflicting data or update filmographies and biographies by linking "annotations" to any of the entries. What you do is write a paragraph—in plain text, with no underlining or accents—that is stored on your hard disk, ready to display, and to whose existence you are alerted by a hypertext-colored paper clip in the article you've annotated.

As a video guide, *Cinemania* is thorough and useful, except that it doesn't go beyond indicating whether a given title was ever released on video; it ought to list the tapes and laserdiscs of that title, with their distributors, running times, and letterboxing and restoration information. And the information on the movies themselves ought to include their aspect ratios and whether they were in stereo.

As a toy, *Cinemania* is entertaining, and the video clips allow you to test and play with your system. As a critical anthology, it is relatively superficial; the biographical and topical articles are good but just introductory. Many more books, scholarly catalogs, and historical documents could profitably be added.

As a factual reference and research tool, *Cinemania* is not quite as accurate as the books it reproduces, even if they too are in need of proofreading and verification. But in the electronic world, *Cinemania* has no competition. Look up Lillian Gish in America Online's film-credits database and you get little more than *The Whales of August*. Or spend hundreds of dollars on Hollysoft's *FilmCredits* (not a CD-ROM but a regularly updated set of floppies) and you'll find that its often inaccurate listings go "all the way back 1980."

Because of the encyclopedic nature of the books it includes, *Cinemania* contains a rich database, most of which is, paradoxically, locked up by the way it is accessed. The fastest way Microsoft could improve *Cinemania* would be to let us get at this information. And to proofread the text with a degree of care—a respect for the finished product as a finished product—not usually found in the computer industry.

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■ Bruce F. Kawin is Professor of English and film studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

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Couching Resistance

Women, Film, and Psychoanalytic Psychiatry

By Janet Walker. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. $44.95 cloth; $16.95 paper.

Janet Walker's *Couching Resistance* examines relations between women, cinema, and the institution of American psychiatry between World War II and the mid-1960s, proposing that during this period Hollywood cinema and American psychoanalytic psychiatry played crucial roles in defining feminine psychosexuality and women's life experience. The result is a fascinating look at the ways in which women were represented as subjects in the worlds of Hollywood fictions and of mainstream psychiatry.

The first two chapters examine psychiatry as a context for understanding Hollywood films, especially in terms of projecting ideas about femininity and female deviance. Marriage and psychiatry, along with considerations of transference, are raised in detailed readings of *Whirlpool*, *The Three Faces of Eve*, and *Tender Is the Night*. *The Snake Pit*, *The Cobweb*, and *Lilith* provide a look at women in mental hospitals. Women as psychiatrists are explored in analyses of *Spellbound*, *Knock on Wood*, and *Three on a Couch*. A final chapter considers interactions between psychiatrists and film-makers through correspondence about three films: *Shock*, *The Snake Pit*, and *Freud*. In the course of the analyses, many other relevant films are referenced, and the author provides more extensive filmographies related to cinema and psychiatry. The scope of Hollywood's interest in questions of psychiatry and mental illness is thereby amply evidenced.

The strength of the book includes its double-edged focus, as it provides an overview of U.S. psychiatric practice during this period—especially as it situated women as "privileged" subjects for a range of pharmaceutical and electroshock therapies—and provocative readings of individual films. Walker introduces multivalent senses of the concept of resistance as a key term for her approach. Resistance signals an obstruction of the psychoanalytic process and at the same time is at the heart of the psychoanalytic project, since working through a patient's resistance can constitute the psychoanalytic cure. At the same time, the term implies active resistance to dominant norms, including political activism or symbolic behaviors to challenge constituted power. In her readings of films, Walker suggestively follows this range of implications, indicating where and how normative expectations are at work, and where they are undermined or challenged.

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The first two chapters examine psychiatry as a context for understanding Hollywood films, especially in terms of projecting ideas about femininity and female deviance. Marriage and psychiatry, along with considerations of transference, are raised in detailed readings of *Whirlpool*, *The Three Faces of Eve*, and *Tender Is the Night*. *The Snake Pit*, *The Cobweb*, and *Lilith* provide a look at women in mental hospitals. Women as psychiatrists are explored in analyses of *Spellbound*, *Knock on Wood*, and *Three on a Couch*. A final chapter considers interactions between psychiatrists and film-makers through correspondence about three films: *Shock*, *The Snake Pit*, and *Freud*. In the course of the analyses, many other relevant films are referenced, and the author provides more extensive filmographies related to cinema and psychiatry. The scope of Hollywood's interest in questions of psychiatry and mental illness is thereby amply evidenced.

The strength of the book includes its double-edged focus, as it provides an overview of U.S. psychiatric practice during this period—especially as it situated women as "privileged" subjects for a range of pharmaceutical and electroshock therapies—and provocative readings of individual films. Walker introduces multivalent senses of the concept of resistance as a key term for her approach. Resistance signals an obstruction of the psychoanalytic process and at the same time is at the heart of the psychoanalytic project, since working through a patient's resistance can constitute the psychoanalytic cure. At the same time, the term implies active resistance to dominant norms, including political activism or symbolic behaviors to challenge constituted power. In her readings of films, Walker suggestively follows this range of implications, indicating where and how normative expectations are at work, and where they are undermined or challenged.

Walker starts by examining professional psychiatric and medical journals as well as popular magazines, tracing the play of adjustment and resistance in articles and advertisements. Adjustment therapies involved fitting patients into highly conformist behaviors, with resistance emerging to challenge conventional expectations. In this context, psychoanalytic psychiatry offered greater interpretive latitude and nondirective possibilities than extreme adjustment therapies like electroshock or pharmaceutics. But it was often implemented in the spirit of helping women find their "proper place" in everyday social life. Walker concludes:

> In all it seems a limited view to construe the psychiatrist-patient relationship in the postwar era as a relationship that admitted only of techniques to adjust the patient to the dominant ideology, or for that matter only of techniques that resisted "adjustment therapy." . . . [T]he therapeutic discourses through which the doctor-patient relationship was articulated aligned themselves with *both* impulses and so represented a contradictory discursive field. (50)

The idea of contradictory discursive fields—in both psychiatry and cinema—is in turn projected onto a linear, progressive narrative. Through the course of the period under scrutiny, psychiatry was increasingly challenged, from both within and without, especially with the rise of the women's movement of the 1960s. Concomitantly, films increasingly challenge and subvert normative ideas about female sexuality and subjectivity, and criticize formal psychoanalytic practices, especially adjustment therapy. For example, in the chapter on "Marriage and Psychiatry," Walker notes that *Tender Is the Night* is

> [A] good specific example of a general trend in the development of the whole cycle of films as they came to bear more and more the marks of a growing challenge to psychiatric authority. All share the dual impulses of adjustment and resistance, but in the later films the impulse of resistance to narrative modalities of adjustment psychiatry comes eventually to dominate. (85)

She proceeds to compare *Tender Is the Night* with *The Locket*, arguing that "the use of incest as the childhood trauma in *Tender Is the Night* instead of the loss of a locket is not a matter of indifference, but a matter of historical difference." (86) A similar historical progression guides the discussion of films about women in mental institutions, as *Lilith* is seen to exacerbate the challenges to psychiatric authority that are nonetheless apparent in *The Snake Pit* and *The Cobweb*. "In all of these films, to a greater or lesser extent, the narrative oscillation between inside and outside, illness and health, reveals these terms to be highly unstable." (92)

In other words, a tension emerges in the book between its recognition of contradictory discourses at work throughout the period under study (both in films and in psychiatric discourse) and its delineation of a progressive "loosening" of the authority of psychiatry (especially for women) over the course of the same period. This accounts for a central interest of the study, as it works to define historical specificity through unstable and often contradictory discursive fields. At the same time, this tension intersects with a somewhat problematic distinction between text and context, which is also part of the effort to ground the project historically. Walker asserts from the outset, "The gist of the project lies not so much in the delineation of film textual discord as in the insistence that the *ideological import of filmic representation is legible only in reference to a wider field of cultural representations*." (author's emphasis, xxiii) She proposes that the discourses of professional psychiatry provide the appropriate contextual grounding. Her readings of the films as unstable navigations of adjustment and resistance suggest that the meanings unleashed cannot be foreclosed theoretically. But the call for "contextualization" insists that they can (and ought to) be historically grounded by discursive, institutional practices that are "external" to the cinema.

As a result, the readings of individual films exceed the more conventional framework that the author provides: the text/context distinction and the linear, progressive narrative. In the process, Walker does not necessarily lose historical specificity, but begins to redefine what constitutes historicity (without clearly articulating this). The book is at its best when it reads Hollywood and psychiatry as two parallel discourses—both regulating female psycho-subjectivity, both negotiating adjustment and resistance—but not always in the same terms.

This even includes the possibility of reversing the terms of the context/text divide. For Walker offers evidence that Hollywood's representations of psychiatry can be, and were at times, considered a context for interpreting psychoanalytic practice as a "text." When psychoanalysts rushed to condemn *Shock* because of its negative portrayal of psychiatry they seemed to presume that the public would not necessarily construe the film in light of psychoanalytic discourse or their own experiences of analysis. Rather, they assumed that a single, particular, negative Hollywood portrayal might become an overwhelming interpretive "ground" for understanding psychiatry (with implications for the profession and its reputation).

More generally, since much of the contextual discourse Walker considers comes from professional sources (though some evidence is from more popular sources), it is not fully clear for whom it functioned as a discursive "context," except for psychiatric professionals and contemporary scholars. (Though it is the case that a lot of people in Hollywood were exposed to psychiatry.) In this light, Walker does not consider whether or how the print ads in professional journals (in particular those promoting pharmaceutical products) position the professional psychiatric community as an audience and consumers for a product, and create their own fictions of psychiatry and adjustment, ones that might be at odds with more theoretical approaches to the field. This might offer another avenue for articulating psychoanalysis, adjustment, resistance, and gender in psychiatric and cinematic discourse, including introducing consideration of the ways in which both the cinema and psychiatry were permeated by economic discourses and practices.

In the end, Walker does suggest the vitality of psychoanalysis for understanding film and vice versa in concrete historical terms. In this way the substantive contribution of the book enacts its own interpretive resistance to an introductory framework which bears the marks of adjustment to more conventional and familiar, if ultimately inadequate, schemas for theoretical and historical scholarship.

MIMI WHITE

■ Mimi White teaches in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at Northwestern University.

Eisenstein Rediscovered

Edited by Ian Christie and Richard Taylor. New York: Routledge, 1993. $49.95 cloth.

How many reviews of anthologies note that the collection in question seems uneven? How many reviews of published conference proceedings suggest that the papers may have been more appropriate to a scholarly meeting than to the printed page? Add one more to each of those lists: this collection is uneven, and the papers doubtless played better live.

The source for *Eisenstein Rediscovered* is the "Eisenstein at 90" conference held at Oxford in 1988. The conference in turn was coordinated with an exhibit on Eisenstein's life and work at Oxford's Museum of Modern Art. The stellar international array of participants and the proximity of primary Eisenstein materials in the exhibit doubtless produced an intellectually stimulating event. It did not, however, produce a publication which would encourage many informed readers to "rediscover" Eisenstein, the volume's title notwithstanding.

Some 13 scholarly papers and two new translations of Eisenstein essays make up the collection. Co-editor Christie provides a lively, informative introductory essay on the myriad challenges of studying Eisenstein's complicated career. In suggesting how Eisenstein's reputation has been made and remade in the West, how difficult it is to establish a definitive Eisenstein corpus, and how post-Soviet revisionism might affect future Eisenstein scholarship, Christie raises a set of issues that should prove not so much daunting as invigorating to researchers. Despite the volume's promise, however, surprisingly few of the contributions propose bold revisionist positions or tap into previously unused sources from the vast Eisenstein archives.

That is not necessarily to condemn those who don't. In fact, some of the very best contributions deal with issues that are already part of the Eisenstein scholarship, and they either clear up matters or refine familiar views. Kristin Thompson's convincing historical account of Eisenstein's foreign reception ("Eisenstein's Early Film Abroad") takes up the oft-asked question, How did Eisenstein do at the box office? (Her answer: Pretty well, all things considered.) Robert Leach's essay on "Eisenstein's Theater Work" finds connections between Eisenstein's early Constructivist productions and Brecht's epic theater. That isn't counterintuitive, and other students of European modernism have noted parallels. Leach traces them with particular care and with persuasive effect. Mikhail Yampolsky ("The Essential Bone Structure") addresses the abiding issue of mimesis in Eisenstein's theory, arguing that Eisenstein reformulates that concept to mean a resemblance to the structure of things rather than to their external appearance. This certainly isn't a scoop, but Yampolsky's subtle reading of key theoretical texts and his elaboration of the layered metaphors Eisenstein employs to redefine mimesis prove impressive.

Among the essays that do use new sources to good advantage are Yuri Tsivian's discussion of *October* ("Eisenstein and Russian Symbolist Culture") and Hakan Lovgren's reconstruction of "Eisenstein's Pushkin Project." The former exploits a hitherto unknown script variant of *October* to sustain a thesis about the importance of Symbolist aesthetics in Eisenstein's early work. The latter patches together information from several Russian-language sources on one of Eisenstein's many unfinished projects. The Pushkin film was to have

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been shot in color, and Lovgren's reconstruction offers some appreciation of how Eisenstein hoped to incorporate color into his aesthetic.

Too many essays carry traces of an unsuccessful translation from verbal presentation to print. Naum Kleiman's chatty "Arguments and Ancestors" mentions a number of Eisenstein precursors and influences which have not been fully researched. These remarks by the world's leading Eisenstein authority may have generated edifying discussion at the original conference, but their value diminishes in this volume, since, in fact, none of the issues raised in Kleiman's inventory of things-needing-to-be-done are taken up by other contributors. David Stirk and Elena Pinto Simon's "Jay Leyda and *Bezhin Meadow*" contend that Leyda's photographic record of the ill-fated *Bezhin Meadow* project provides insight into such important aesthetic issues as the acting modes Eisenstein prescribed for the film. This may be true, but the text proper doesn't make the case and there aren't enough stills in the essay to demonstrate this.

Despite Eisenstein's notorious eclecticism, it is quite possible for researchers to make claims about him that are simply wrong and that no amount of new research will make right. Arun Khopur ("Graphic Flourish") professes to analyze Eisenstein's concept of mise-en-scène and ends up addressing only Eisenstein's limited notion of expressive movement. And Khopur manages to confound that term. Michael O'Pray ("The Frame and Montage in Eisenstein's 'Later' Aesthetic") bases his essay on a false premise about composition in Eisenstein's early film, one which apparently comes from a secondary source, Stanley Cavell on Eisenstein. This leads to a troubled thesis about continuity between Eisenstein's early and late films.

Editors Christie and Taylor have done much over the years to expand Western scholars' understanding of early Soviet cinema. They can be thanked for encouraging the continuing reconsideration of Eisenstein through projects such as this and should be only mildly reproached for any missed opportunities the collection betrays. After all, there will be future Eisenstein volumes and many more occasions for him to be "rediscovered."

VANCE KEPLEY, JR.

■ Vance Kepley, Jr., teaches film in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Ideology and Cinematography in Hollywood, 1930–39

By Mike Cormack. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. $45.00 cloth; $15.95 paper.

In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson demonstrate how film style is related to the mode of production. As Mike Cormack points out, they explain the film style of the 1930s in terms of three major determinants—the industry's desire 1) to make production economical and efficient, 2) to generate product differentiation, and 3) to establish standards of quality. Changes in film style are seen as directly determined by changes in the mode of production and by technological change. Since these factors remain fairly stable from 1917 to 1960, Bordwell et al. are able to identify a single, (relatively) consistent, and coherent stylistic paradigm which dominates production during this period.

Cormack takes issue with this thesis on two grounds—Bordwell and his coauthors ignore ideology as a stylistic determinant and they "flatten out" film history, reducing a varied succession of stylistic change to a monolithic "classical Hollywood style." Cormack insists upon the primacy of ideology over all other factors in the determination of film form and argues for a set of evolutionary stylistic paradigms that constantly changes from 1930 to 1939. For him "there were significant stylistic changes in Hollywood films during the thirties" and "these changes can *only* [emphasis added] be fully explained by considering the specific ideological forces at work on the films." Cormack dismisses technological determinism and ignores modes of production in favor of ideology, which emerges as all-determining. Even Comolli, whose seminal essays on "Technique and Ideology" are never cited by Cormack, acknowledges that technique and technology in the cinema were driven by more than merely ideological demands; they were the products of social and economic demands as well.

Cormack seemingly disarms potential critics by defining ideology as a product of socioeconomic conditions, presumably retaining the social and the economic as subsets of the ideological. His interest in economics is always socioeconomical, consisting chiefly of statistical tables indicating unemployment and attendance figures. In other words, his focus is on the economics of the larger society rather than those of the film industry. Thus he ignores the economics of technology (studio investment in technological development, economic incentives as-

been shot in color, and Lovgren's reconstruction offers some appreciation of how Eisenstein hoped to incorporate color into his aesthetic.

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sociated with using certain technologies, the reluctance of the industry to convert to color). For example, nowhere does Cormack mention that the various cinematographic styles of the studios depended, in part, on how much each studio was willing to spend on electricity (for lights), on camera support systems, on set and costume design, or on other aspects of production which play a role in a film's mise-en-scène.

Cormack defines ideology as society's dominant self-image, an image that is ultimately tied to socioeconomic conditions. Since the structure of socioeconomic conditions of the FDR years remained fairly stable, Cormack concludes that Americans shared a common, dominant ideology. Within this dominant ideology different forces struggled and different voices debated, but their struggles and debates were governed by a fundamental agreement about the values and beliefs these various factions held to be basic (such as democracy, patriarchy, and capitalism). Changes within film stylistics reflect this contestation of the dominant ideology through variations upon and departures from the classical paradigm.

Cormack views the early, pre-FDR 1930s as a period of cultural crisis which produced considerable stylistic instability. This consisted chiefly of "the generally dark tones of the lighting," the isolation of characters within their environment, "ambiguity," "unpredictability," unmotivated camera angles and movements, and extremes of camera distance. By the end of the 1930s, there was a more "open" style, seen in high-key lighting (in which nothing was hidden), motivated camera angles and movements, and few, if any, extremes in camera distance. Resistance to the dominant ideology surfaces in violations of some Platonic norm ("the classical paradigm"), while observance of these norms results in an "ideological cohesion" which provides an illusory coherence to society's self-image. The editors of *Cahiers du cinéma* found the style of *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) "subversive." It critiqued the ideology it transmitted. Cormack (who does not cite the *Cahiers* essay) argues to the contrary about films of the late 1930s. He concludes that "not only does the [open] style not hinder the ideological content, but it actively promotes it."

Cormack documents his argument through statistical analysis of sample 100-shot sequences from *All Quiet on the Western Front, The Public Enemy, Susan Lennox, The Most Dangerous Game, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 42nd Street, Viva Villa!, Bride of Frankenstein, Les Miserables, The Awful Truth, The Adventures of Robin Hood, Three Comrades, Dead End, The Hound of the Baskervilles,* and *Gone with the Wind.* He looks at camera movement, camera distance, camera angle, lighting (editing—exclusive of matching—is discussed in terms of camera distance and angle); he does not discuss composition, deep focus, color (*Robin Hood* and *GWTW* were both filmed in color), costume or set design, or figural movement. In discussing lighting, Cormack makes no acknowledgment of Peter Baxter's essay "On the History and Ideology of Film Lighting." Since the book deals with cinematographic style, sound is not analyzed; this omission severely limits any conclusions the author might draw about film style in general. There are no frame enlargements, production stills, or photographs of any kind in the book to illustrate his argument.

Cormack's use of statistical analysis resembles that of Barry Salt (whom he cites repeatedly). Indeed, the book would seem to be an attempt to extend Salt's studies of film style and technology by addressing the issue of ideology, which he steadfastly refused to do. Yet I respect Salt's intransigent empiricism and remain suspicious of Cormack's ideological gloss. *Public Enemy* (1931) does not "depart from the 'invisibility' of conventional film technique." If it is darkly lit, then it is "conventionally" so, observing the norms of the gangster genre. The same might be said for *All Quiet* (1930), whose extreme long shots and dark lighting can be seen as typical of the genre. How else does one film battle scenes (without long shots) or night patrols (without low-key lighting)? Cormack's equation of "dark" with "danger" also strikes me as reductionist.

Ironically, what Cormack's statistical analyses reveal is how uniform film style in the 1930s is. An early 1930s war film, *All Quiet*, does not seem to be all that different from a late 1930s war film, *GWTW*. Of course, my generalization is based only on superficial appearance. Cormack does not provide statistics on long and extreme long shots for *GWTW* so it is impossible to compare it with *All Quiet*; the same is true for *Public Enemy* and *Dead End*, two "gangster" films. Full stats are only provided for *All Quiet* and *Jekyll and Hyde*, so no comparison of Cormack's statistics can be made by the reader from one period to the next. Cormack's 170-page volume lacks the rigor and thoroughness of the 506-page, double-column book by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson which he attacks. How can anyone take seriously a study of cinematography in the 1930s that does not even mention *American Cinematographer* or any other "primary" sources? There can be no comparison of Cormack's work to the exacting scholarship of Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson. Standards have been set for the discourse in this field, and Cormack doesn't quite meet them.

JOHN BELTON

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Perspectives on Federico Fellini

Edited by Peter Bondanella and Cristina Degli-Esposti. New York: G. K. Hall, 1993. $60.00.

When Roland Barthes declared the author dead in his celebrated essay of 1968, he touched off a fire storm of controversy in film criticism. Of course, looking back at his essay today, we might find it merely a modest attempt to dislodge the author from a position of authority over the "meaning" of a text and to open up the text as a field of play for meanings. The result for film studies, though, was far-reaching. Perhaps Barthes's essay was the excuse film scholars were looking for to turn their attention away from auteur criticism to other things, ranging from global issues about the nature of film to popular genres such as the Western, the melodrama, film noir, horror films, and most recently, slasher films. However, Barthes notwithstanding, the auteur approach never really died. It redefined itself. Certain auteurs like Welles, Hitchcock, Ford, Kurosawa, Bergman, and of course Fellini became, in effect, genres. The cine-structuralists considered the auteur a useful signature for gathering films with their own codes and structures which could be studied, as we do the codes and structures of various genres, and Edward Buscombe cautioned that such auteur gatherings need to be studied not in a vacuum but in terms of their symbolic relationships with society and with other films, again as we can and often do when we study a genre. Finally, of course, postmodernists have gone on to decenter the subject/author or deconstruct the notion of a single auteur in the text, but to do so they needed at least provisional auteurs on whom to practice their skills. So auteurism continues, embattled, tattered, but nevertheless hardy. Many of us consider it interesting to think about the Hitchcock film or the Fellini film as a generic category and to examine the "genre" for what it can offer us. In Fellini's case, this seems especially viable now since his recent death—when we may feel we have all the parts of the genre before us. Bondanella and Degli-Esposti's admirable collection of recent essays on Fellini demonstrates that we have come to such a point, but have perhaps not quite realized all the possibilities of our situation.

Perspectives on Federico Fellini contains 24 articles and think pieces, all of them published since Bondanella's previous collection, *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism* (Oxford, 1978). An important strength of the book is that the editors have drawn their selections from Italian and French criticism as well as American, English, and Canadian. Bondanella and Degli-Esposti have divided the book into four categories: "Artistic Origins and the Evolution Beyond Neorealism," "The Mature Auteur," "Feminism and the Image of Women," and "Fellini and Contemporary Film Theory." The first and the last sections are clearly the best ones, although for quite different reasons, and the second and third are mixed sections with some fine pieces and some which are either too strained or too slight.

The first section, which concerns the early part of Fellini's career, contains mostly "traditional" auteur criticism in the sense that the essays deal mainly with sources and backgrounds for Fellini as well as some close readings of his early works. What makes the section valuable is that the background work is done very carefully and the insights are often shrewd. Two essays stand out in particular: Bondanella's own study of Fellini's apprenticeship as a scriptwriter before he became a director and Millicent Marcus's essay on *La Strada*.

The final section of the book, which looks at Fellini from the point of view of contemporary theory, seems equally as valuable as the first section but, as I suggested earlier, in a very different way. Here, the writers do begin to look at the Fellini film as a genre unto itself, and they bring various aspects of contemporary theory to bear on it. The most interesting piece here is Frank Burke's "Fellini: Changing the Subject." He argues that beginning with *8 1/2,* Fellini engaged in the postmodernist strategy of decentering the subject or shattering the idea of a single protagonist who can control, in some sense, his own narrative. Further, Burke argues that in later films, when Fellini offers himself as the creative mind in the film—the protagonist as it were—he performs the same splintering of himself and thus kills the auteur in his movies himself. I am not always convinced by Burke's argument. It seems to work better with some films than with others. Fellini, for instance, was interested in the notion of the group protagonist as early as *I Vitelloni*, and this rather straightforward concept of the group as protagonist may inform films such as *Amarcord* or *Orchestra Rehearsal* more than the complex one of the shattered single subject does. Yet the argument seems to work very well in *8 1/2* and perhaps *Juliet of the Spirits,* where it provides Burke the means to read the difficult endings of those films in a very persuasive way. In any case, it is in the fourth section of *Perspectives on Federico Fellini,* with essays like Burke's, that the criticism seems at its most sophisticated, for Burke is trying not just to "explain" Fellini or "define" the Fellini film but also to find Fellini's place within the postmodern movement.

The section on "The Mature Auteur," the second one in the book, is perhaps less ambitious than the other two already discussed, for it consists mainly of readings of individual films. Some of these readings are quite good—Charles Affron's discussion of spectacle in *8 1/2*

and Bernard F. Dick's essay on the adaptation of *Fellini Satyricon*. Others, however, seem strained. John Welle, for instance, demonstrates certain borrowings from Dante in *La Dolce Vita*, and Walter Foreman shows certain uses of foundation myths from Virgil and Mircea Eliade in *Roma*. Both writers may prove their cases, but I doubt that many readers will find their appreciation of the films enriched very much. It is as if Welle and Foreman are trying to "justify" the films by attaching them to illustrious names. There are, however, at least two essays which are exceptions to my generalization about the limited scope of the essays in this section. Ben Lawton's "Fellini and Literary Tradition" offers a kind of modernist view of Fellini in contrast to Burke's postmodern one. He discusses Fellini's concerns with the rejection of the allegory of love, the perception of film as film, and Pirandellian play with form and life. And James Hay's "Grandfather Fascism and *Amarcord*" displays the same kind of careful analysis as Bondanella's essay demonstrates. Hay looks at the way *Amarcord* gathers in and deconstructs images from the earlier Fascist period.

I found the section on "Feminism and the Image of Women" the least interesting part of the collection, and this surprised me, since I had expected to find it the most challenging to traditional Fellini scholarship and therefore the most groundbreaking. Particularly disappointing was Teresa De Lauretis's "Fellini's 9 1/2." After a fine introductory section on feminist approaches to film, De Lauretis discusses her uneasiness with Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits* as a treatment of one woman's relation to Woman as a cultural representation. For the explanation of her uneasiness, if not the solution to it, De Lauretis turns to Carolyn Geduld's excellent essay, "Guido's Anima," and, especially, to Geduld's insight that Juliet could be considered the Jungian anima figure of Guido in *8 1/2*. While it is strikingly honest of De Lauretis to point out the importance of Geduld's insight, it is also a letdown that De Lauretis doesn't have more to add on her own. The most impressive essay in this section is Gaetana Marrone's "Memory in Fellini's *City of Women*." She reads the movie in terms of Jung's three stages of ego-memory from *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, but the essay is more Jungian than feminist and so does not particularly aid the kind of feminist project De Lauretis and other writers in this section pursue. Since Fellini was so deeply involved in Jungian thought—at least since the 1960s—it may be that feminists will need to examine and criticize Jung's conception of archetypes from outside Jungian psychology first and then move on to Fellini's particular versions of the anima figure. This is, of course, a tall order, but it is also, I think, an exciting one.

Perspectives on Federico Fellini is, in the final analysis, an encouraging book. It demonstrates two new areas—postmodernism and feminism—where important work on the Fellini films needs to be done, and it also provides excellent examples of more traditional kinds of studies which can only help to set very high standards for such work in the future.

JOHN C. STUBBS

■ John C. Stubbs teaches courses in narrative and in film at Virginia Tech.

Redefining Black Film

By Mark A. Reid. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993. $30.00 cloth; $15.00 paper

With *Redefining Black Film*, Mark Reid brings the subject of American film's development of black images under close inspection again. From the mid-1970s, several researchers, such as Donald Bogle (1973), Daniel J. Leab (1976), James Murray (1973), and Thomas R. Cripps (1977, 1978) have surveyed the representation of blacks in American cinema, largely from a historical perspective. Reid's project—the redefinition of his title—is proposed in two ways: as an expansion of the category "black film" to include film genres not previously analyzed and, through a systematic application of recent theories of spectatorship, as a corrective assessment of black films as cultural and ideological products. His study is prompted by the desire to understand the ways black images are employed in films to shape meanings and to redeem film creativity from its racist legacy. Oddly, Reid invokes Marx, Freud, and Althusser and ignores the considerable literature of American film critics, both black and white, who have written about race in American films.

Reid's analysis traces black imagery to the minstrel and focuses on efforts to reform black symbolic representations under the creative control of black film artists. He believes that by redirecting research to blacks' cultural production in films, fresh insights about the medium's potential for expressivity and appeal may be gained. To accomplish this, Reid sketches out two interrelated film histories: a history of black participation in films as writers and directors, and a history of black independent film production across three genres of

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black-oriented films—comedy, family, and urban-action films—that are not "controlled by whites."

Reid's research into the nature of black film-making has produced a provocative volume that brings a good deal of recent critical film theory to bear on the subject of black films and audience reception. However, for every intriguing notion that he raises, there seem to be as many questions unasked. Reid's assertion of a "black mode of artistic production" (i.e., one that takes place outside the American system of financing and distributing films) is rather problematic. Provided one could deduce such a mode, would all black film-makers have to work within its parameters? What is the relation between film aesthetics and this black mode? Moreover, such a formulation effectively eliminates the possibility that racial sensitivity can be developed and combined with artistic creativity among non-blacks. The heart of the problem seems to be Reid's methodological approach. His method for analyzing black film images consists of constructing a matrix that uses minstrelsy and a textual analysis of dialogue as its parameters. Once a film has been sifted, its representation of black family life, male-female relations, and a lower-class consciousness is evaluated. Unfortunately, this process does not guarantee against the taint of political correctness. For example, given U. S. census statistics on divorce, does not the film-maker risk creating another myth by favoring images of nuclear families? And why the romance of the lower class in social isolation from middle-class blacks and whites?

Reid's research embraces black films from 1900 to 1990 and distills from them three basic categories: black comedy films (based on coarse minstrelsy); black family films (about the "typical" black family within the black communities); and black action films (combining sexually explicit scenes with physically or psychologically aggressive behavior that leads to violence, or fear, or horrifying characters and events). Against this backdrop, Reid intends to articulate and document a theory of film-making that African Americans can take title to and identify as uniquely crafted by blacks to reflect their sensibilities and points of views.

In chapter 1, for example, Reid points out that in 1910 Bill Foster founded the first black film company (Bill Foster Photoplays) in Chicago to allow black innovation—already transforming musical theater—a fresh venue. Foster's programs, according to Reid, not only featured black, urban melodramas, but included a further humanizing touch by including company "star" Lottie Grady as soloist between reels. Unfortunately, Reid's interest in using these very early film activities as the basis of his theorizing is frustrated by the fact that none of Foster's films is extant, nor does Reid offer posters, or advertising, or a representative sample of reviews, or the opinions of Foster's contemporaries for comparison or analysis. Sadly, there is little indication that Reid has made any effort to track down such crucial historical sources. Next, Reid points to Oscar Micheaux as a figure who honed his entrepreneurial zeal into an incisive understanding of the entertainment marketplace. Micheaux (Micheaux Book and Film Company) is an intriguing subject because several of his novels, films, examples of promotional materials, correspondence, and actual colleagues survive for analysis and questions. However, Reid's critique of Micheaux's work is based only upon a small, careful selection of positive, contemporaneous newspaper reviews, thereby neglecting sources that reveal the reception of his films by audiences of black critics, writers, and artists and the fact that he was criticized for propagandizing for light-skin privilege among African Americans. It does the cause of film and black studies no service to uncritically celebrate Micheaux and to touch on early film-makers so glancingly.

Reid continues by examining selected African-American comedy, family, and black action films to assess their relationship to that earlier legacy. Limiting himself to the minstrel form as the origin of American entertainment images of blacks that reinforce an ideology of white male superiority, Reid derives three categories for explaining black film genres. First, early comedy films which were customarily contaminated by whites in coarse blackface are identified as, simply, "minstrelsy." Second, "hybrid minstrelsy films" recycled racist film stereotypes of non-threatening blacks for the pleasure of white audiences with the cooperation of black actors desperate for work. Third, "satiric minstrelsy" is that style of black humor that appeals to white audiences because it ridicules "contemporary racial and social inequities." The common thread that runs through these categories of films is what Reid calls the tendentious racial joke, which acts as part of a semiosis that reinforces white (essentially male) privilege.

Against these three categories of black film representation, Reid advances an aesthetic of black film, defined as resisting narratives that use conventional oppositions of black against white, privilege racial hierarchies, or reinforce racial dualism by merely reversing roles or engaging in satire, and which reflect the struggle of black Americans and can be enjoyed by both black and white audiences. Reid believes that in the second half of this century, blacks and whites working within Hollywood conventions revamped family narratives to express the first glimpses of that aesthetic ("black-oriented sociopolitical content"). It is his position that black Hollywood actors—despite the persistence of minstrelsy—improved their techniques for creating black audience identification with and assimilation of black heroes. In discussing black film actors' craft, Reid wants

to locate a fundamental change in black character depiction in the post-World War II era. However, he provides no social or professional contextualization for this shift. Film production and distribution as a business/cultural institution monitor social trends and public attitudes, but are constrained by management not to risk getting ahead of change. How then does Reid account for the creation of an environment in which black actors gain previously withheld dignity?

He advances his investigation by refining the three-part construct (minstrelsy, hybrid minstrelsy, and satiric minstrelsy) of black roles and applying it across black action and black comedy films made after the war. In each subgenre of black film, Reid finds and acknowledges the attempts to update and refine black film images. But while the minstrel entertainment form is a necessary background to understanding American theatrical traditions, it is not a sufficient category for describing and analyzing the variety of dramas and roles associated with the black image in American films. A discourse whose vocabulary is limited to speaking only in minstrel terms fails to appreciate the rich literature of critical research on black images (for example Lawrence Reddick, Alan Potemkin, and James Baldwin).

Reid believes that the remedy for the problematic nature of film imagery lies within the noncommercial, independent cinema of black feminists (such as Madeline Anderson, Goretti Mapalunga, Alile Sharon Larkin, and Kathleen Collins) and several selected black male film-makers (for example, Charles Burnett, Billy Woodbury, and Larry Clark) because these categories of film exist outside and apart from Hollywood and represent an alternative system of financial support for film-makers. Since black independent feminist and male film directors must create within limited budgets, Reid argues against evaluating their work by Hollywood criteria, insisting that critics and historians recognize these cultural products by their efforts to create "serious, balanced images of . . . the African-American community."

Reid is at his best when he applies himself to the analysis of motion pictures: *Take a Giant Step* and *A Raisin in the Sun*. In each case he performs a thorough analysis that challenges previous readings of these films and leads to new appreciation of black writers' struggles to engage America's consciousness. Reid claims that these films benefited from hiring black scenarists to do a draft of their original work for film and that this work infused the project with its black aesthetic. However, a draft of a scenario is hardly the equivalent of writing the full screenplay. And what's missing here is a discussion of how a playwright whose creativity is sacrosanct in the theater deals with an industry that treats writers like creative lepers.

In Reid's definition of black film-making, where financing comes from is crucial: studio or commercial sources are always bad; government and nonprofit are always good. It may be the case that commercial film-making is limiting (although commercially produced black images have been updated over time and these changes should be studied), but Reid fails to define the ways the film-making process, whether public or private sector, interposes itself between film-makers and audiences. His position forestalls any discussion of the ways black film-makers might negotiate within existing commercial film-making parameters to hew sensitive, appealing, and effective images of black men and women and black communities' contestation against entrenched institutional interests. Moreover, is it necessarily true that soliciting government or nonprofit agency support frees film-makers from creative pressure or attempts to influence imagemaking, however subtle?

A volume that subjected selected films with black themes or black actors to thorough interrogation based on solid research would have been a welcome contribution to the discussion of blacks in American films and to film studies generally. Such a volume would be a change from the kind of celebratory writing that sometimes passes for research on this subject. Reid deserves praise for collecting within these two sections of his book a very useful catalogue of recent films by young black directors. It is easy to imagine that many will want to own *Redefining Black Film*, if only to have it available as a handy reference for programming their own or their classes' screening schedules.

MICHEAL POUNDS

■ Micheal Pounds is an associate professor in the Radio, Television and Film Department at California State University, Long Beach.

Ronald Reagan in Hollywood

Movies and Politics

By Stephen Vaughn. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. $24.95.

Complicating Ronald Reagan's 1980s' apotheosis as California Governor and then President, Stephen Vaughn delineates some of the central political issues of the Cold War period, but also just misses an

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Complicating Ronald Reagan's 1980s' apotheosis as California Governor and then President, Stephen Vaughn delineates some of the central political issues of the Cold War period, but also just misses an

opportunity for a fully nuanced analysis of the last 60 years of American political history. Vaughn focuses on a relatively brief period of Reagan's career, the years 1937 to 1952. These dates mark his Hollywood debut at one end and, at the other, his marriage to Nancy Davis, his departure from Warner Bros., and the end of five consecutive terms as President of the Screen Actors Guild. Vaughn's thesis, and it is an effective one, is to show that, rather than "simply" having been an actor and corporate spokesperson before becoming Governor of California, Reagan was, in fact, an active politician even during the early 1940s. His historical thesis, however, seems less compelling: that Reagan changed dramatically "from a follower of Franklin D. Roosevelt to industry spokesperson and anticommunist," with these years marking his "emerging conservatism." (x)

In the 1940s and the 1950s, Hollywood was an alphabet soup of political activism, what with HICCASP, MPIC, and COMPO, all film industry groups that, along with the Screen Actors Guild and other organizations, tried to regulate film labor practices and guarantee the loyalty—that is, anti-Communism—of film workers. Reagan became a vigorous joiner, participating in all manner of political organizations, and got the chance to act upon his anti-Communism. As a Screen Actors Guild official, for instance, he fought long and hard against the bitter 1945–46 studio strikes, certain that they were Communist-inspired and -organized. Indeed, one of the real strengths of Vaughn's book is his explication of these particular labor problems, which tend not to be fully discussed in most Hollywood histories but which helped set the stage for the witch hunts to come.

In the most compelling sections of the book, Vaughn shows the complexity of Reagan's politics years before the cartoonish "evil empire" ideology of the 1980s. As President of the Screen Actors Guild, for instance, Reagan could act upon his anti-Communism through the imposition of loyalty oaths and blacklists. But because he also saw himself as an industry spokesperson, he could not unproblematically support the House Committee on Un-American Activities' broadsides against the movie business. It is easy to think of the motion picture industry and the federal government as a vast institutional monolith during the 1950s; Vaughn helps to show how they were united around the common goals of discovering and ferreting out Communists, but that they were also fractured around certain issues of policy and practice.

Vaughn has accomplished his "reading" of Reagan's early political career through an impressive gathering of archival materials. More information on these sources, however, would have better established Vaughn's own methodological uses of official documents, and also aided other historians. He never explains, for instance, how he acquired Reagan's FBI file. Because the ex-President is still alive, his permission for the file would have been required under the Freedom of Information Act, unless different rules—of which I am unaware—apply for national political leaders. In addition, Vaughn's admirable use of documents is counteracted, at least in part, by the author's often uncritical reliance on Reagan's autobiography, which sounds cloudy and homily-filled at best, and at times downright fabricated.

Vaughn has written an interesting, complex book, and I admire his use of corporate and governmental documents. My complaints, however, concern some of his methodological practices. The first part of the book, primarily about Reagan's film career between 1937 and 1941, assumes that the actor's film roles influenced not only the formation of his public persona (undoubtedly true) but also Reagan's own political formation (a very tricky thing to prove). In addition, Vaughn will too often use a historical model based on unproblematic change; for instance, to demonstrate that sexual mores differed after the war, Vaughn cites divorce rates, "births out of wedlock," and the celebrity of Dr. Spock and B. F. Skinner. (220–21) But it is not at all clear that this selection of data can be interpreted quite so easily, nor that it demonstrates conclusively that most people viewed sex differently in 1946 from, say, 1939.

I do not want my main argument with Vaughn to indicate dissatisfaction with his overall project. I wish, however, that historians in general would not be so eager to believe that Reagan "changed" in his political viewpoint, from Rooseveltian liberal to arch conservative. Instead, we need a full critique of New Deal ideology, one that might show its compatibility with many aspects of postwar conservatism. Such a project would not demonize the New Deal (at least if your opinion of Reagan is the same as mine), but rather complicate it, and might show that Roosevelt's real political genius lay in building coalitions between supporters of Father Coughlin on the right and, on the left, such Communist party members as the screenwriter John Howard Lawson. If we accept the truth of Reagan's political sea change, as Vaughn does, we also accept the myth of political maturation as being marked by a movement to the right, and we accept, as well, the belief in the absolute binary opposition of liberal and conservative. In other words, we buy into the version of politics and history that became the structuring principle of Reagan's various attempts at autobiography, and the cornerstone of both his governorship and his presidency.

ERIC SMOODIN

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The Show Starts on the Sidewalk

An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre

By Maggie Valentine. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994. $35.00.

Students of film history should welcome this new book about the role of exhibition. Begun as a dissertation at UCLA, and based on primary information, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk* proclaims that it will tell us about the evolution of the American motion picture theater. But *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk* does not want to be another dull art historical tome and so seeks to be as entertaining and lively as a Hollywood movie.

Sadly, its execution represents something quite different. The author, an assistant professor of architecture and interior design at the University of Texas at San Antonio, does not provide an encyclopedic architectural history, but rather narrowly illuminates the motion picture exhibition in the U.S.A. within the context of a case study of the career of a single architect, S. Charles Lee.

Such a strategy only works if it can be argued that Lee stood in a central place within the history of movie theater design. But he did not. One can see this vividly in data Valentine herself provides in two useful appendices. The first lists the number of operating movie house in the U.S.A. This peaked in 1928, then declined through the 1930s, as the Great Depression forced cinemas to close and ended most building. Yet in the second appendix, a list of S. Charles Lee's opus, we see that the bulk of his cinema house creations opened during the 1930s and 1940s.

Furthermore Lee-designed theaters were nearly all located in the Far West, principally in California, and nearly all were built by a single patron, Twentieth Century-Fox. Lee was a great, bold architect, as can be seen in his Reseda, Visalia, and Perris theaters, which still survive in California. But his career was neither typical nor representative. Indeed, S. Charles Lee must be categorized as a bold exception.

Valentine also argues that Lee's designs were influential prototypes. But again, this pushes her case too far. As can be seen in design after design, lovingly reproduced in this book, Lee worked in the art deco style. The vast majority of movie palaces in the U.S.A. were inspired by different, far older styles. (French, English, and Spanish models most influenced the movie palace style, as designed by the brothers Rapp, Thomas Lamb, and others; Oriental and Chinese-style theaters can still be found in major cities.)

To her credit, Valentine seeks to go beyond the classic art-historical paradigm, and she tackles economic, social, and political questions, but to accomplish this daunting task, she seems to have undertaken precious little original research, instead relying upon published work. So for the first three chapters, aside from comments by Lee (which Valentine herself discounts in her preface), we read a social history of the rise of the movie palace based upon the writings of others.

Valentine too often slips into simplistic nostalgia. The book contains nine (non-numbered) chapters, with cute titles such as "Double Feature" (surveying the literature about the movie palace movement of the 1920s), "Teaser" (stylistic analysis of the work of S. Charles Lee), and "Newsreel" (the effects of World War II on Lee's career).

But there is some fine work here. Valentine's best chapter analyzes how World War II forced Lee to journey outside California for work. But the suburbanization of the U.S.A., which commenced soon after World War II, ended Lee's career as a movie house architect. S. Charles Lee in turn became a major developer, turning southern California into the suburban capital of the United States.

Film books today, with few notable exceptions, suffer badly from inadequate reproduction of images. Not *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk.* In its 200 pages of analytical text, we find more than 100 photographs from UCLA's S. Charles Lee Collection. By my count, there are also 27 images in color, including Valentine's own photographs of the Lee buildings as they stood in the late 1980s. I praise the author and Yale University Press for doing such a fine job. As one can see throughout *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk,* but rarely elsewhere, the colors of the movie house provided a richness and texture which have long played a significant role in the presentation and enjoyment of the films. For Valentine's color photographs of the box offices for the Vogue Theater in Oxnard, California, and the Tower in Fresno alone, I can recommend *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk.*

DOUGLAS GOMERY

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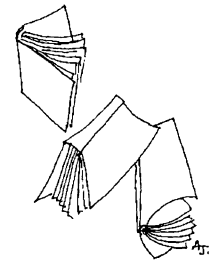

Book Notes

Contributors to Book Notes:
Leo Braudy is on the *Film Quarterly* editorial board; Stephen Prince is the Book Review Editor of *Film Quarterly*.

Haines, Richard W. *Technicolor Movies: The History of Dye Transfer Printing*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1993. $28.50. This clearly written book is a lament for the passing of what was arguably the greatest color system ever devised for the movies. In comparison to its successor, Eastmancolor, Technicolor's dye transfer prints had highly saturated flesh tones, vibrant primary colors, and virtually opaque blacks—all of which lent a three-dimensional appearance to the Technicolor image. In addition, Tech IB was virtually fade-proof when properly processed and stored. The appalling record of Eastmancolor with respect to film fading is all too apparent.

Haines covers the history of Technicolor from its early two-strip days to its demise in the U.S. in 1974. He explains the initial additive two-strip system and its dye transfer replacement, then devotes a lengthy chapter to the mature three-strip system introduced in live action features with 1934's *Becky Sharp*.

Unlike many discussions of Technicolor, this book provides detail on such issues as how the relief matrices were used in the dye transfer process, the operation of the photomechanical printing process (similar to lithography), the methods of making 16mm dye transfer prints for nontheatrical markets, and the problems of quality control specific to 16mm (a section that should be of interest to 16mm collectors).

After explaining the operation of Tech in the 1930s and 1940s, Haines discusses the antitrust suit filed against Technicolor in 1947, the impact upon the Technicolor company of the 1948 consent decree, the marketing of Eastmancolor negative, and the introduction of television. He closes with a description of the demise of dye transfer printing in the U.S. in 1974 and the destruction of dye transfer matrices which has left, in many cases, only faded Eastmancolor negatives. The loss of the Technicolor legacy was dramatically illustrated with 1983's reissue of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Printed on Kodak's then-new "low fade" stock, the prints looked dismal compared to Tech originals.

STEPHEN PRINCE

Sklar, Robert. *Film: An International History of the Medium*. Harry N. Abrams, 1993, $49.50. This lavishly illustrated and handsomely produced volume seems aimed at a very particular audience of buyers, those who want not only the heft and gloss of a coffee-table book put together by a noted art-book publisher but also the scholarly breadth and depth of a text by a noted film historian.

Robert Sklar's take on film history is as concertedly "international" as his title says, and he goes well beyond the obligatory sections on Soviet and German film in the 1920s, French film in the 1930s, and Japanese film in the 1950s to include accounts of major films and film-makers from a wide variety of countries. Even though many of his stills often feature production shots of directors, his approach is much less auteurist than that of most film histories. Instead of being treated in full-scale sections, individual careers are interwoven with the general history of the medium, economically, politically, and technically. This may seem to imply a lot of skipping around from topic to topic, but Sklar usually handles the process extremely well.

Each chapter is broken up into brief topical sections with beautifully reproduced (and often rarely seen) illustrations as well as sidebars on special topics, ranging from the problematic nature of a term like "national cinema" to the career of John Kitzmiller, "Neorealism's Black G.I." The structure is generally effective, although especially toward the end the intertitles start coming thick and fast, and the commentary tends to be a little too scrappy.

Sklar interprets his historical emphasis broadly. A chapter on the transition to sound is filled with a wealth of technical information and illustrations of new techniques, and he keeps the interest on technical innovation and change throughout. Two chapters on documentary and propaganda especially allow a thematic focus on issues otherwise dispersed in more aesthetically oriented histories. But even in auteurist terms, Sklar seeks new territory, including discussion of such film-makers as Lois Weber, Alice Guy Blaché, and Oscar Micheaux.

Yet, although intellectual comparisons are obvious, this is no book to compete physically with Gerald Mast's *A Short History of the Movies* (as revised by Bruce Kawin) or David Cook's *History of Narrative Film* as texts for the classroom or the library shelf. It can't be stuffed handily into a briefcase or read sitting up in bed. But it would be a shame if Sklar's frequently trenchant and always interesting take on film history would be entombed in a book destined to be looked at more often than it is read.

LEO BRAUDY

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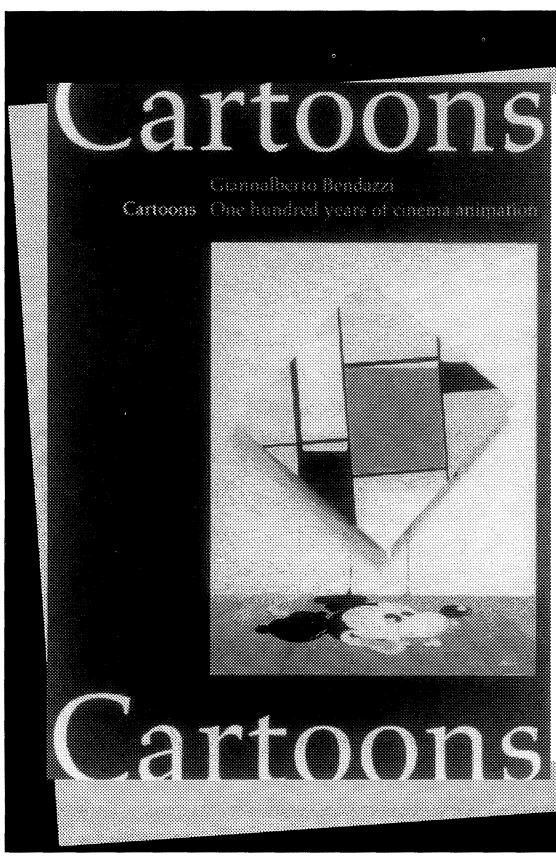

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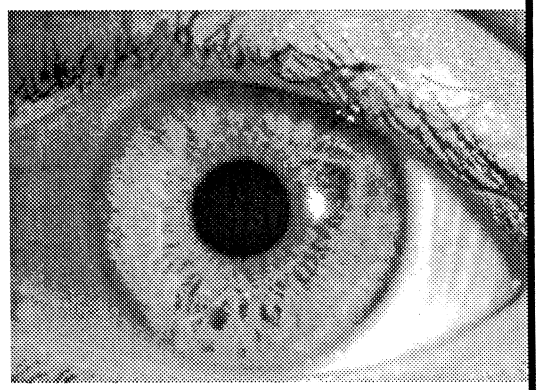

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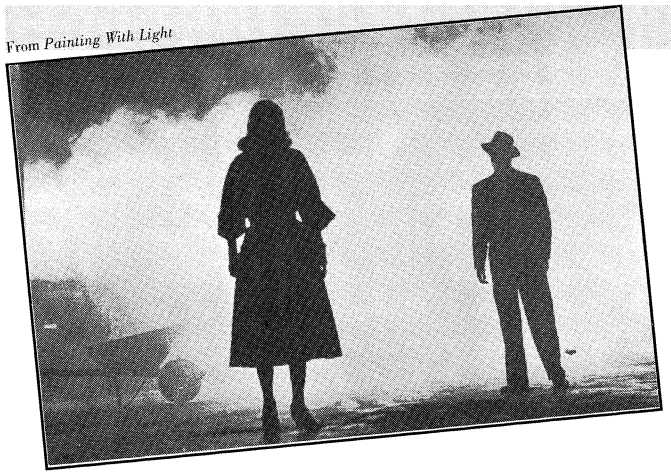

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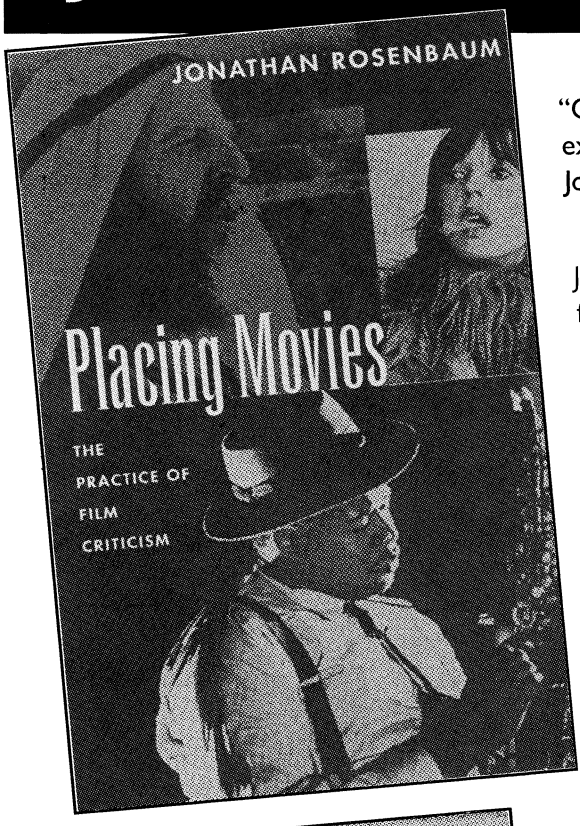

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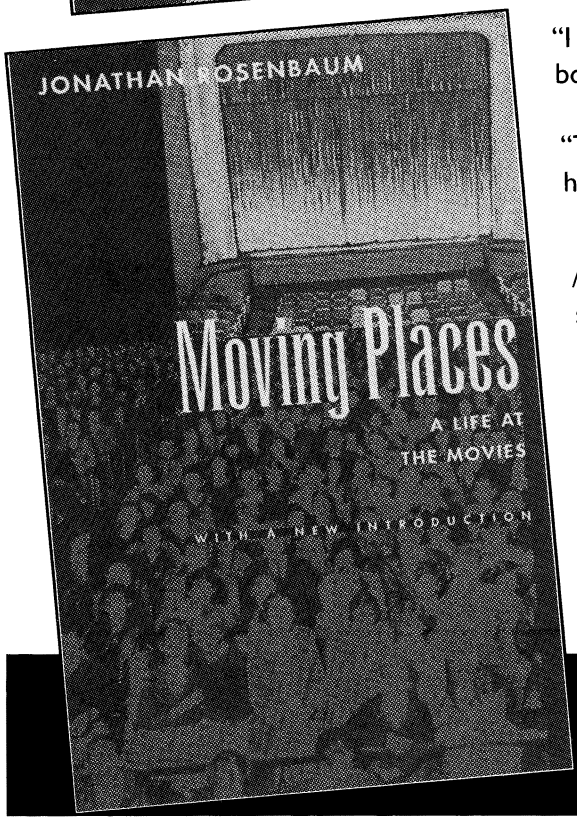

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